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The Three Musketeers

by

Alexandre Dumas

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E. M. GOPALAKRISHNA KONE

MADURA & MADRAS

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THE THREE MUSKETEERS

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THE THREE MUSKETEERS

of

ALEXANDER DUMAS

Abridged and Retold

BY

WILLIAM TURNER, M.A.
PRINCIPAL,
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1932.
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MADURA AND MADRAS

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INTRODUCTION.

Alexander Dumas, the famous French novelist and dramatist, was born in 1802, his father being a general in the army. Dumas himself lived in poor circumstances, and, like his hero D'Artagnan, came to Paris at an early age to seek his fortune. It was under the influence of the Shakespearean plays, produced in Paris by Kemble, that Dumas produced his first romantic drama, *Christine.* Like Shakespeare, Dumas liked to take up old episodes from byegone history, and invest them with fresh dramatic life and power.

In the revolution of 1830, Dumas was involved in the fighting in Paris, and the sights he saw there would account for the view of the cheapness of human life, found in so many of his writings. His plays *Henry III* and *Napoleon Bonaparte* brought him into conflict with the authorities.

Starting first as a writer of short stories, Dumas gradually took to long historical novels, and, in this sphere, proved himself fit to do for French literature what Scott had done in England. In 1844, he produced the famous " cloak and sword " romance, *Les Trois Mousqetaires,* the materials for which he drew from the *Memoirs of M. D'Artagnan.* The romantic exploits of the dashing D'Artagnan, the gigantic Porthos, the refined Aramis, and the melancholy Athos, and the manner in which they all unite to defend the queen against the machinations of the arch-plotter, Richelieu, form a series of scenes in which the interest never flags and the atmosphere is always replete with thrills. The

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history of England tells us that the Duke of Buckingham was assassinated at Portsmouth by a religious fanatic, as he was leaving in 1629, with an expedition in relief of the French Protestants at La Rochelle. Dumas makes this event of more deep and political significance than the historians have done, and connects it intimately with the intrigue of the French Court. The adventures of the four friends are continued in further volumes: *Twenty Years After*, *The Vicomte de Bragelonne*, and *The Son of Porthos*. The Three Musketeers have been famous with French readers, and, translated into English, have been the joy of innumerable English schoolboys. The series is rivalled in popularity by *The Count of Monte Cristo*. In recent years, *The Three Musketeers* has formed the material of a thrilling cinema film.

1st Sept. 1932. W. Turnbull.

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"What does this mean, Cardinal?" Page 62.

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THE THREE MUSKETEERS

CHAPTER I.

D'Artagnan leaves home.

On the first Monday of the month of April, 1625, the small town of Meung in France appeared to be in a state of revolution. Many of the townsmen proceeded towards the Inn of the *Jolly Miller,* to which a vast mob was hastening with intense curiosity. Having reached it, one could see and understand the cause of this alarm.

A young man was there, who appeared to be a Gascon. An inexperienced eye might have taken him for the son of a farmer on a journey, had it not been for the long sword which banged upon the heels of its owner when he was walking, and against the rough sides of his steed when he was mounted. This steed was remarkable, a Beaunese pony yellow as an orange. The strange animal created an unfavourable impression which seemed to be extended to his master.

His father, the elder D'Artagnan, had left him this remarkable steed. He added the advice, "Never submit quietly to the slightest indignity, except it proceed from the cardinal or the king. It is by his courage

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alone that a gentleman makes his way nowadays. I have but fifteen crowns, my son, to give you, besides the horse and this advice. I wish to speak to you of M. de Treville, once my neighbour. He has fought battles, and now, behold, he is captain of the king's musketeers. Go to him with this letter."

Our youth took his departure the same day, and his mother presented to him a wondrous ointment which had the power of curing all wounds in a short time. He was an object of wonder on his yellow horse, until he came to the town of Meung. As he alighted at the Inn, he saw at an open window a gentleman of distinguished air, conversing with two persons who appeared to listen with deference. D'Artagnan listened, and it seemed that the subject of conversation was his own remarkable yellow steed. As he listened, the gentleman made a wise and profound remark about the yellow horse. The two listeners roared with laughter. There was no room for doubt; D'Artagnan felt that he was insulted. So he placed one hand on his sword, and approached the window.

"This horse decidedly is a buttercup," remarked the gentleman. "It is of a colour well known in botany, but as yet very rare among horses."

"A man may laugh at a horse who would not dare to laugh at its master," said D'Artagnan with fury. And he made such a furious thrust at the humourist that, had he not jumped back briskly, the jest would probably have been his last. Perceiving now that the affair was beyond a joke, the unknown drew his sword and gravely put himself on guard. But, at the same time, his two auditors, accompanied by the host of the

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inn, fell upon D'Artagnan with sticks, shovels, and tongs.

D'Artagnan's sword was broken in two, and a blow on the head stretched him out senseless. It was now that all the townsmen hastened to the scene of action. The strange gentleman saw him carried into the kitchen of the inn, where some care was given to him.

"Well, how is the madman now?" said he, turning and addressing his host, who came to inquire how his guest was.

"He slapped his pocket, and said 'We shall see what M. de Treville has to say to this insult offered to me.' In his pocket I found a letter addressed to M. de Treville, captain of the Musketeers."

The stranger now left the window-sill, on which his elbow had rested, and frowned like a man disturbed all of a sudden.

"The devil!" he muttered! "Could Treville have sent this Gascon? Are his clothes with him?"

"On the contrary, they are down below in the kitchen, while he lies upstairs in my wife's room."

"If I could only learn the contents of this letter to Treville!" muttered the stranger. And thus muttering, he descended to the kitchen. Presently he returned and prepared to mount his horse which was waiting in front of the inn.

"Never mind," said the host, "though I have lost one guest, I have secured this one whom I am sure of keeping for some days; at all events, I shall gain eleven crowns."

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It must be borne in mind that eleven crowns was the exact sum which remained in D'Artagnan's purse, and the host had reckoned upon eleven days illness at a crown a day. On the next day, D'Artagnan descended and demanded oil, wine, and rosmary, with which he compounded his mother's recipe for the cure of wounds. So he found himself on his feet in the evening and almost cured by the next day. But now D'Artagnan found nothing in his pocket but his purse, with its eleven crowns. As for the letter to M. de Treville, that was gone. The young man began to look very patiently for this letter; but when he was quite convinced that the letter was not to be found, he gave vent to another fit of rage.

"My letter of introduction!" cried D'Artagnan, "my letter of introduction, or I shall transfix you all."

One circumstance prevented the youth from accomplishing his threat, for his sword, as we have said, had unfortunately been broken in two in the first struggle. Consequently when D'Artagnan now drew it in earnest, he found himself armed only with the stump, some eight or ten inches long, which the host had carefully thrust into the scabbard.

"Where is this letter?" roared D'Artagnan; "and let me tell you that this letter is for M. de Treville and that it must be found, otherwise M. de Treville will know to have it found—I answer for it."

This threat completely frightened the host. Next to the king and the cardinal, M. de Treville was the man whose name was most frequently in the mouths of all.

"Did this letter contain anything valuable?" said he, after a fruitless search.

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"I should rather think it did," cried the Gascon, who calculated on the letter to make his way at court, "it contained my fortune." A sudden flash of light illuminated the mind of the host, who was uttering maledictions at finding nothing.

"It has been taken from you," he exclaimed. "The stranger yesterday went into the kitchen where your jacket was lying. I am sure it was he who stole it from you. When I informed him that your worship had a letter addressed to M. de Treville, he seemed much disturbed, demanded where the letter was, and immediately went into the kitchen where your jacket was lying."

"Then he is the robber," said D'Artagnan. "I will complain to M. de Treville, and he will lay my complaint before his majesty."

And he majestically handed two crowns to the host and remounted his yellow horse, which carried him without further accident to Paris. There he sold the yellow animal for three crowns and entered Paris on foot, carrying his small valise under his arm. He then found a lodging suitable to his slender resources, and procured a new blade for his sword. After this, he returned to the Louvre and learned from the first musketeer he met where M. de Treville's hotel was situated. Then he went to bed and slept like a rustic till nine o'clock in the morning.

CHAPTER II.

The Ante-Chamber of M. de Treville.

M. de Treville had actually begun life like D'Artagnan. His daring and haughty courage, at the time when blows fell thick as hail, had raised him to the top of the ladder which is called court favour. Louis XIII therefore appointed Treville captain of the Musketeers. In this respect, the famous Cardinal Richelieu was not behind the king, for when he saw the formidable guard with which Louis surrounded himself, this second king of France also had his musketeers. Each boasted of the skill and courage of his own guards, and while openly condemning duels and fights, secretly incited his followers to fight.

From six in the morning, during summer, and eight in the winter, the courtyard of Treville's hotel resembled a camp. From fifty to sixty musketeers were stalking about incessantly, fully armed. From one end to the other of the long staircase, ascended and descended petitioners who sought favours and liveried servants delivering messages from their masters to M. de Treville.

On the day when D'Artagnan presented himself, the assembly was very imposing, especially to a provincial just arrived in Paris. In the midst of this crowd and disorder, our youth, holding his long sword against his slender legs, advanced with beating heart. In the ante-chamber, D'Artagnan listened to many tales of the court. There he heard the policy, which made all Europe tremble, openly criticised, as well as the private life of the cardinal.

D'Artagnan, a little recovered from his first surprise, had now time to study those around him. In the

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midst of the most animated group was a musketeer of great height and haughty countenance. He wore a close coat of sky-blue, slightly faded and worn, with a magnificent border of gold embroidery, which glittered like a sunlit stream. A long mantle of crimson velvet hung gracefully from his shoulders, displaying his splendid belt from which hung an enormous rapier. Every one admired the gorgeous belt, D'Artagnan more than anyone else.

"Ah, Porthos!" said one of the bystanders, "do not try to make us believe that this lace comes from the paternal generosity. It has been given to you by some admirer."

"No, upon my honour, and by the faith of a gentleman, I bought it with my own money," said he whom they called Porthos. "It is quite true, and I paid twelve pistoles for it."

The wonder and admiration were redoubled, though the doubt still existed.

"Is it not so, Aramis?" enquired Porthos, turning to another musketeer.

The person thus appealed to was a young man not more than about twenty-three years of age. He had a soft countenance, a mild eye, and a cheek rosy as a peach. Habitually he talked little and slowly, often bowed, and laughed very quietly. He replied to his friend's question by an affirmative inclination of his head, and this appeared to settle all doubts about the embroidered belt.

"M. de Treville awaits M. d'Artagnan," interrupted the lackey, opening the door of the inner room. Everyone was silent, the young Gascon entering the chamber of the captain of musketeers, glad to have escaped from the scene in the ante-chamber.

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CHAPTER III.

The Audience.

M. de Treville was at that moment in a very bad humour; nevertheless, as the young man bowed, he politely saluted him and smiled on receiving his compliments. But first, going towards the ante-chamber, he called three times in a tone of command and anger—"Athos! Porthos! Aramis!" The two musketeers whose acquaintance we have already made immediately quitted their group and advanced towards the cabinet.

M. de Treville paced the whole length of the cabinet three or four times in silence, but with a frowning brow. He suddenly stopped directly in front of them and exclaimed, "Do you know what the king said to me, and that not later than last evening?"

"No," answered the two musketeers, after a moment's silence; "no, sir, we do not."

"He told me that, for the future, he should recruit his musketeers from those of the cardinal."

"From those of the cardinal! And why!" demanded Porthos with heat.

"Yes, yes," continued M. de Treville, becoming more warm, "his majesty was right; for the musketeers cut a very sorry figure at court. Yesterday, while playing with the king, the cardinal recounted that on the previous day these cursed musketeers had loitered beyond closing time in a tavern in the Rue Ferou, and that his guards had been obliged to arrest the disturb-

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ers. You ought to know something about this. Arrest the musketeers! You were amongst them, sirs; do not deny it. Look you Aramis, why did you ever ask me for the tunic of a musketeer? Porthos, have you got such a splendid belt, only to hang to it a sword of straw? And Athos—I do not see Athos; where is he?"

"Sir," answered Aramis, in a melancholy tone, "he is ill, very ill."

"No, no; but doubtless he is wounded, perhaps killed. Ah! I do not understand why you haunt such loose places, why you quarrel in the streets and play with your swords in the crossways. I do not wish you to afford mirth for the cardinal's guards, who are brave men, quiet, and skilful. They would not allow themselves to be arrested, not they! It is you who fly! who scamper away!"

Porthos and Aramis shook with rage. They could have strangled M. de Treville, had they not perceived that his great affection for them was the foundation of all he said.

"Well, captain," said Porthos, "we were six against six, but were taken unawares and before we had time to draw our swords, two of our party fell dead, and Athos was so grievously wounded as to be scarce in better plight. Yet we did not yield ourselves up. No, we were dragged away by force and escaped on the road."

"I did not know these circumstances," said M. de Treville, in a somewhat milder tone; "from what I now learn, the cardinal must have exaggerated."

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"But I beseech you, sir," said Aramis, "do not say that Athos is wounded; he would be in despair if it came to the king's ears; and as the wound is very severe, it is not impossible . . ."

At this moment the door opened, and a noble and beautiful face, but frightfully pale, appeared.

"Athos!" exclaimed both the gentlemen.

"Athos!" repeated M. de Treville himself.

"You inquired for me," said Athos. "My comrades informed me that you commanded my presence, and I hastened to obey you."

M. de Treville, touched to the heart by this proof of endurance, rushed towards him. "Your hand, Athos!" said he, and seizing his hand, pressed it with much warmth. Athos, notwithstanding his command over himself, uttered a cry of pain and fell senseless on the carpet.

"A surgeon!" cried M. de Treville, "or my brave Athos will die." But this eagerness would have been useless, had not the surgeon been found in the hotel. Forcing his way through the spectators, he approached Athos. At length Athos recovered his senses, and the surgeon declared that there was nothing in the situation to alarm his friends, his weakness being entirely due to loss of blood.

Upon a signal from M. de Treville, everyone now retired except D'Artagnan, who did not abandon his audience, but with true Gascon tenacity held his ground. M. de Treville turned, and found himself alone with the young man. D'Artagnan repeated his name;

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and M. de Treville, recalling the past and present, instantly became aware of the situation.

"Pardon," said he, smiling, "pardon me, my dear countryman, but I had entirely forgotten you. What do you want? A captain is merely the father of a family; but it is my duty to see that the orders of the king and the cardinal are strictly executed. I have loved your father; what can I do for his son?"

"Sir," said D'Artagnan, "I wish to ask from you the uniform of a musketeer; but, from what I have seen, I comprehend the extreme importance of the favour and tremble lest I may not be deemed fit."

"It is truly a great favour, young man," said M. de Treville, and no one is received among the musketeers who has not passed through some campaigns, or served for two years in some less-favoured regiment than our own. But, for the sake of your father, I wish to do something for you. I will write a letter to the Director of the Royal Academy, who will receive you to-morrow without any fee. You will there learn to ride, to fence, and to dance; you will form a circle in good society. You must personally inform me of your progress."

D'Artagnan felt the coldness of this reception.

"Alas, sir," said he, "I now feel deeply the want of the letter of introduction which my father gave me for you. I was perfidiously robbed of it." And he recounted his adventure at Meung, accurately describing his unknown adversary.

"It was very strange," said M. de Treville, musingly. "You spoke of me openly, did you?"

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"Yes, sir, such a name as yours served me as a shield on my journey."

M. de Treville smiled with satisfaction. But the smile soon passed away, and, returning to the adventure at Meung, he said:

"Tell me, had not this gentleman a slight scar on his cheek?"

"Yes, yes, that is he; but do you know this man, sir? Ah! if I ever meet him,—and I will find him!"

"Beware, young man," said M. de Treville. "Should you perceive that man walking on the one side of the street, instead of seeking revenge, proceed yourself to the opposite side. Do not dash yourself against a rock, upon which you will assuredly be shattered like glass."

But all at once M. de Treville paused, as if struck by a sudden suspicion; the deadly hatred which the young man so openly avowed for this man who had deprived him of his father's letter—might not this apparent enmity conceal some perfidy? Was he not an emissary whom the cardinal sought to introduce into Treville's house, in order to betray him?

"Young man," he said slowly, "I wish to compensate for the coolness which you perceived in my first reception, and reveal to you our politics. The king and the cardinal are the best of friends and their apparent disputes are merely to deceive fools. Rest assured that I am entirely devoted to these two all-powerful masters. Should you, through your family or connections, bear the slightest hostility towards the cardinal, such as you may have seen burst forth occasionally amongst our nobility, take your leave and quit me."

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But D'Artagnan replied with the utmost simplicity, "Sir, I am come to Paris with sentiments exactly similar to those you have just expressed. My father charged me to obey no one but the king, the cardinal, and yourself. Hence I have the greatest veneration for the cardinal and the most profound respect for his actions. If you entertain any feeling of distrust towards me, so much the worse, as I shall then feel that I am ruined by speaking the truth."

M. de Treville was astonished. So much candour excited his admiration, though it failed in wholly removing his doubts. Nevertheless he grasped D'Artagnan's hand, and said, "You are an honest fellow, but at present I can only do for you what I have promised."

"That is to say," replied D'Artagnan, "that you will wait till I have become worthy of it. Rest assured you will not have to wait long," and he bowed to retire.

"But wait a moment," said M. de Treville, stopping him, "I promised you a letter to the Director of the Academy. Are you too proud to accept it ?"

"No, sir," said D'Artagnan, "and I will answer for it that the same fate that overtook my father's letter shall not occur to this."

M. de Treville smiled at this, and sat down to write the promised letter of introduction. D'Artagnan, who had nothing better to do, looked out of the window at the musketeers. M. de Treville, having written the letter and sealed it, approached the young man. But at that very moment he was astonished to see the young Gascon spring up, redden with anger, and rush out of the room, exclaiming :

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"By Heaven! He shall not escape me this time!"

"And who is he?" demanded M. de Treville.

"It is he—the robber!" replied D'Artagnan. "Oh, what a traitor!"—and he vanished.

"Deuce take the madman!" murmured M. de Treville, "unless it is, after all, a clever mode of giving me the slip, seeing that he has failed in his attempt."

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CHAPTER IV.

The shoulder of Athos, the belt of Porthos, and the handkerchief of Aramis.

D'Artagnan, quite furious, passed through the ante-chamber in three bounds, and reached the staircase. But he suddenly ran full into a musketeer, and, butting his shoulder, made him utter a cry. "Excuse me," said D'Artagnan, trying to continue his course, "but I am in a great hurry."

But a hand of iron seized him and stopped him. "You are in a hurry," exclaimed the musketeer, pale as a sheet, "and you dash against me. You say 'Excuse me,' and think it is sufficient. Do you think because you heard M. de Treville speak bluntly to us today that you can speak to us as he speaks?"

"Upon my word," said D'Artagnan, seeing that it was Athos, returning after the treatment of the surgeon, "I did not run against you on purpose. I said 'Excuse me,' and it seems to me quite sufficient. I am in a confounded hurry."

"Sir," said Athos, "You are by no means polite; it is evident you come from a distance."

D'Artagnan turned back. "Sir," said he, "from whatever distance I come, I assure you that you are not the one to give me a lesson in good manners."

"Perhaps I am," replied Athos, "and you will find me without running."

"And where, may it please you?"

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"Near the Carmes-Deschaux, about twelve o'clock."

"Good!" exclaimed D'Artagnan, "I will take special care to be there."

And he commenced running, still hoping to catch the unknown. But at the corner of the street, Porthos was talking with one of the soldiers on guard, and between the two there was barely room to pass. D'Artagnan tried to rush like an arrow between the two. But the wind blew out the enormous cloak of Porthos, into which D'Artagnan fairly plunged. Porthos did not release his cloak, and D'Artagnan found himself fairly rolled up in it. He feared lest he might injure the magnificent belt of which we have heard so much, but on recovering his vision, he found his head between the shoulders of Porthos, exactly over the belt. Alas! like the fine things of this world which are only made for show, the belt was of gold in front and plain leather behind. Porthos, proud as he was, being unable to afford a belt entirely of gold, had procured one of which half at least was of that metal.

"Good gracious!" cried Porthos, trying to free himself from D'Artagnan, "you are mad to throw yourself in this manner upon people."

"Excuse me," said D'Artagnan, reappearing from beneath the shoulders of the giant, "but I am running after some one."

"Do you shut your eyes when you run?" demanded Porthos.

"No," answered D'Artagnan, becoming angry, "and thanks to my eyes, I can see what others do not see."

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Porthos gave way to his anger. "Sir," said he, "you will get yourself chastised if you thus rub against the musketeers."

"Chastised, sir!" said D'Artagnan; "your expression is harsh."

"It is just as becomes a man who is accustomed to face his enemies."

"Ah, by St. Denis," replied D'Artagnan, "I know well that you would not turn your back upon yours," and the young man, delighted with his joke, marched off laughing.

Porthos foamed with anger, and D'Artagnan said, "By and by, when are you without your cloak?"

"At one o'clock, behind the Luxembourg," shouted Porthos.

"Very well, at one o'clock," answered D'Artagnan, as he turned into the street adjoining.

But neither in the street which he had just traversed, nor in that down which he looked, did he see anyone. The stranger had disappeared. D'Artagnan enquired from everyone he met, but, as the perspiration bathed his forehead, his heart grew cool and he began to reflect on the events which had just transpired. He gave himself the following rebukes as a guard for the future: "What a hare-brained fellow I am! The brave and unlucky Athos was wounded on the shoulder, against which I ran like a ram. As for Porthos, upon my word, it is even more droll. He would doubtless have pardoned me had I not spoken of that accursed belt. Foolish Gascon that I am!"

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D'Artagnan, thus walking and soliloquising, had arrived a few paces from the hotel, before which he found Aramis gaily talking to three of the king's guards. D'Artagnan made them a profound bow, accompanied by a gracious smile. Aramis bowed slightly, but did not smile. Silence fell upon the group. D'Artagnan perceived that he was an intruder, but was not sufficiently skilled in the ways of polite society to withdraw dexterously. He suddenly perceived that Aramis had dropped his handkerchief, and, accidentally, no doubt, had set his foot on it. So D'Artagnan stooping down with the most graceful air, drew the handkerchief from under the musketeer's foot, saying, "I believe, sir, that this is a handkerchief which you would be sorry to lose."

The handkerchief was indeed richly embroidered, and had a coat-of-arms in one corner. Aramis blushed, and snatched it from the Gascon.

"You are wrong," said he, "this handkerchief is not mine, and I know not why this gentleman has the fancy to give it to me. Here is my own." So saying, he drew out his own handkerchief, a very fine one.

Immediately afterwards the conversation ceased, and the friends separated, the three guardsmen going one way and Aramis another.

"I hope, sir, that you will excuse me," said D'Artagnan, addressing Aramis.

"Sir," rejoined the latter, "you must permit me to remark that you have not acted as a man of good breeding ought to have done."

"You do me injustice, sir," said D'Artagnan. "I am a Gascon, and when a Gascon has once apologised, he

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thinks that he has done more than one half of what he ought to do."

"So that is the tone you choose to assume, Sir Gascon? Well, I must teach you to behave better."

"I shall send you back, with a lesson," retorted D'Artagnan, "please draw your sword at once."

"No, not here, at any rate. We are opposite a hotel which is full of the cardinal's friends. Who can say that it is not his eminence who has commissioned you to procure my head for him? I will kill you at leisure in some retired spot, where you may not be able to boast of your death to anyone."

"I am quite agreeable," replied D'Artagnan, "and take your handkerchief, whether it belongs to you or not. Probably you may have tears to dry."

"Spoken like a true Gascon, sir," said Aramis. "At two o'clock I shall have the honour of awaiting you at the hotel of M. de Treville, whence I will conduct you to a more convenient spot."

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CHAPTER V.

The King's Musketeers and the Cardinal's Guards.

D'Artagnan was friendless in Paris. He therefore went to meet Athos without being provided with a second, having made up his mind to be satisfied with those which accompanied his adversary. He fully intended to offer the brave musketeer all suitable apologies, but, at the same time, to betray nothing having the slightest appearance of timidity and weakness. He disliked this duel, as one does when a young and vigorous man fights with an opponent who is wounded and enfeebled. Should the former be vanquished, the triumph of his opponent is doubled; should he be the conqueror, he is accused of being brave at small risk.

Athos, who continued to suffer from his wound, awaited his opponent with that air of calmness and dignity which never forsook him.

"Sir," said Athos, "I expected two of my friends who are to act as my seconds. I am surprised that they should be late."

"I have no second, sir," said D'Artagnan; "I only arrived in Paris yesterday; consequently I am unknown to anyone here except M. de Treville."

Athos mused for an instant, then said, "So if I should kill you, I shall acquire the reputation of a child-eater."

"Not entirely so," said D'Artagnan, "since you draw your sword against me while suffering from a wound which must occasion you great inconvenience."

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"Inconvenience! I assure you that you hurt me most confoundedly. But I will use my left hand, as I usually do in such circumstances. I fight equally well with either hand."

As he spoke, the gigantic form of Porthos was seen at the end of the street.

"What!" exclaimed D'Artagnan, "is M. Porthos one of your seconds?"

"Yes," replied Athos, "and here is the other."

D'Artagnan looked in the direction indicated by Athos, and beheld Aramis. "What!" he cried, in a tone of yet greater astonishment, "is M. Aramis the other of your seconds?"

"Certainly; are you not aware that one is rarely seen without the others, and that amongst the musketeers and the guards we are known as the three inseparables?"

In the meantime, Porthos approached, shook hands with Athos, and turning towards D'Artagnan, seemed lost in astonishment. He had changed his belt, and laid aside his cloak.

"It is with this gentleman that I am about to fight," said Athos, pointing towards D'Artagnan, and saluting him.

"And I also am going to fight him," said Porthos.

"But not until one o'clock," interrupted D'Artagnan.

"And I also—it is with him that I am to fight," said Aramis, who had arrived on the ground just after Porthos.

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"Our appointment, however, is for two o'clock," replied D'Artagnan with the same coolness.

"But what are you going to fight about, Athos?" demanded Aramis.

"Upon my faith, I do not well know, except that he hurt my arm."

"And now that you have all arrived, gentlemen," said D'Artagnan, "permit me to offer my apologies. Do not misunderstand me; I wish to apologise because it is possible that I may not be able to pay my debt to all three; for M. Athos has the right to kill me first, which greatly decreases the value of your bill, M. Porthos, and renders yours, M. Aramis, of only the slightest value. Therefore, gentlemen, on that account alone, I again repeat my offer of apology."

"It is very hot," said Athos, "and yet I cannot take off my doublet, for just now I perceived that my wound bled, and I fear to distress this gentleman by showing blood which he has not drawn from me himself." He placed himself on guard.

But the two swords had scarcely met when a party of the cardinal's guards, commanded by M. de Jussac, appeared at the corner of the convent.

"The cardinal's guards!" exclaimed Porthos and Aramis at the same moment. "Sheath swords, gentlemen!" But it was too late. The combatants had been seen in a position that left no doubt as to their intentions.

"Hulloa, musketeers!" cried Jussac, advancing and signalling to his men to do the same. "What, fighting here? And the edicts—have you forgotten them?"

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"You are extremely generous, gentlemen of the guards," said Athos, in a tone of the most bitter animosity, for Jussac had been one of the aggressors on the night before last. "If we saw you fighting, we should not prevent it, therefore please let us alone and you will enjoy the spectacle without the pain."

"Gentlemen," answered Jussac, "what you request is impossible. Duty takes precedence of everything else. Sheath, therefore, if you please, and follow us."

"They are five," said Athos in a low voice, "and we are only three; we shall be beaten again and we must die here. I positively swear I will not again appear before the captain, a vanquished man."

Athos, Porthos, and Aramis closed up on each other, while Jussac drew up his men. D'Artagnan now made his resolution; it was a choice between the king and the cardinal. To fight was to disobey the law and to make an enemy of a minister more powerful than the king himself. But he did not hesitate a single instant.

"Gentlemen," said he, "you affirmed that you were but three, but it seems there are four of us. I have not the dress, but I have the heart and soul of a musketeer."

"Hark ye," said Jussac, "you may retire; we permit you. Save your skin, and that quickly."

"You are truly generous," said Athos to D'Artagnan. But all three thought of D'Artagnan's youth, and feared his inexperience.

The nine combatants rushed together with fury. Athos took Cahusac, one of the cardinal's favourites; Porthos selected Biscarrat; and Aramis found himself

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opposed to two adversaries. As for D'Artagnan, he sprang towards Jussac himself.

The heart of the young Gascon throbbed violently with eagerness. He fought with the fury of an enraged tiger, every moment changing his guard and position. Jussac was a skilful and experienced swordsman, but he found the utmost difficulty in defending himself against his adversary, who was so active and nimble. At length the struggle was brought to a conclusion by Jussac's rashness. He made a tremendous lunge, at the same time stepping forward, but D'Artagnan parried the thrust, glided like a serpent under his weapon, and passed his sword through the body of Jussac, who fell heavily to the ground.

D'Artagnan threw an anxious glance round the field of battle. Aramis had killed one of his adversaries and the other still pressed him strongly, but he was in good trim and could very well defend himself. Athos, wounded afresh by Cahusac, looked more and more pale but did not yield an inch. According to the laws of duelling, D'Artagnan was at liberty to assist any one of his companions. While he sought to ascertain which of them most required it, he caught a glance from Athos which served instead of speech. Athos would have died sooner than call for assistance, but his look denoted how much he needed support. D'Artagnan fell at once upon Cahusac, exclaiming, "Turn, sir guardsman, or I kill you!"

Cahusac did turn, just as Athos had sunk upon one knee. "Do not kill him, I beseech you," said Athos; "I have an old affair to settle with him when I am cured. Disarm him only—good, very good!"

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This was on seeing the sword of Cahusac flying from his hand a distance of twenty paces. D'Artagnan and Cahusac both rushed forward to secure the weapon, but D'Artagnan reached it first and placed his foot upon it. Cahusac then went to the guardsman killed by Aramis, seized his rapier, and was returning to D'Artagnan, but again he encountered Athos, who had recovered his breath and wished to renew the contest. In a few minutes, Cahusac fell pierced in the throat. At the same moment, Aramis placed the point of his sword at the breast of his fallen adversary, and compelled him to sue for mercy.

Porthos and Biscarrat alone remained fighting. Athos, Aramis, and D'Artagnan therefore surrounded Biscarrat and summoned him to surrender. Though against four, and with a wound in his thigh, Biscarrat, who was also an obstinate Gascon, refused to yield. But Jussac raised himself on his elbow and commanded him to yield. So Biscarrat suddenly sprang back and broke his sword over his knee, in order that he might not have to surrender it.

Bravery is always respected, and all the musketeers saluted him. Then they carried Jussac, Cahusac, and the unwounded opponent of Aramis under the porch of the convent, and rang the bell. They took the remaining four swords of their opponents, and, full of joy, proceeded towards M. de Treville's hotel. Every musketeer they met joined them and the march became a triumphal procession.

"If I am not yet a musketeer," said D'Artagnan to his new friends, "I am at least next door to one."

CHAPTER VI.

His Majesty King Louis the Thirteenth.

M. de Treville strongly censured his musketeers in public, but privately they heard only his congratulations. It was essential that no time should be lost in gaining the king, so he hastened to the Louvre. The king was playing cards, and was in an excellent humour. He had already had an interview with the cardinal, so as soon as he saw M. de Treville, he exclaimed :—

"Come here, my captain, that I may chide you. His eminence has complained of your musketeers, and is quite full of emotion. Well, really, these musketeers of yours are perfect devils!"

"No, sire," replied M. de Treville, "on the contrary, they are very good creatures, with only one wish, that their swords should never leave their scabbards except in time of war. But the guards of the cardinal are continually seeking quarrels with them, and the poor young men are obliged to defend themselves."

"Hark ye, M. de Treville," said the king, "do you suppose that I give credence to this simple story of yours? I am called Louis the Just, M. de Treville."

So the king rose, and walked with Treville into the recess of one of the windows.

"Well, how did this affair happen?" said he. "You know, my dear captain, a judge must hear both parties."

"Three of my best soldiers, whom your majesty knows by name, made up a pleasure party with a young

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Gascon, a volunteer. They met at the Carmes Deschaux, and were interrupted by de Jussac, Cahusac, Biscarrat, and two other musketeers of the cardinal. What could five armed men be doing in a spot so retired as in the neighbourhood of the convent ?"

"Very true, de Treville, you may well ask that."

"When they saw my musketeers, they showed their enmity towards our corps, who are wholly for the king and are therefore the natural enemies of the guards, who are for the cardinal alone."

"You are right, Treville. So there was a boy with your musketeers ?"

"Yes, sire, and a wounded man. So that three of the king's musketeers, one of them wounded, and a boy, met five of the best of the cardinal's guards and bore four of them to the earth."

"Why, it is a complete victory !" exclaimed the king, radiant with joy. "And you say that this youth acquitted himself bravely ?"

"Most assuredly, sire. They warned him to retire, but he replied that he was at heart a musketeer and wholly devoted to your majesty, and that he would remain with the musketeers. He did remain with them, and gave Jussac that terrible sword thrust which has so much enraged the cardinal."

"He who wounded Jussac ? Jussac ! one of the best duellists in the realm ! I must see this young man. Bring him to-morrow at twelve, Treville."

"At twelve, sire, we will be at the Louvre."

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"By the private staircase, Treville—it is unnecessary to let the cardinal know it. An edict is an edict, and fighting is forbidden by the law."

The same evening, the three musketeers were apprised of the honour. D'Artagnan saw in this future greatness, and passed the night in golden dreams. At eight in the morning, he dressed and went out with Athos. They met Porthos and Aramis at a tennis court, to play a game. But D'Artagnan, who was ignorant of the game, soon declared that he was not up to their standard, and took up his station in the gallery.

Unfortunately for D'Artagnan, there was amongst the spectators one of the cardinal's guards, who was irritated by the defeat of his companions and had resolved to take the first opportunity of avenging it. He now addressed a bystander:—

"It is no wonder that this young man is afraid of the ball; he is, doubtless, a musketeer recruit."

D'Artagnan turned and looked fiercely at the guardsman who had uttered this insolent remark.

"Yes," continued the latter, "you may look at me as much as you please, my little gentleman. What I have said, I mean."

"And since what you have said explains itself," said D'Artagnan in a low voice, "I will thank you to follow me."

"And yet you are wrong, for if you knew my name, you would be less courageous. I am Bernajoux." The guardsman was much surprised that his name did not produce a greater effect on the young man. He was

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a noted fighter, who constantly figured in the daily brawls.

Porthos and Aramis were occupied in their game and Athos was watching them, so they did not perceive the departure of their young companion. D'Artagnan had no time to lose, considering the expected audience, which was fixed for twelve o'clock. He looked round and saw that there was no one in the street.

"Now, sir," he said, "although your name is Bernajoux, it is fortunate for you that you have to deal with a musketeer recruit only. But I will do my best. On your guard, sir!"

In an instant Bernajoux's sword glittered in his hand, and he rushed on his adversary, feeling sure that he would easily overcome such a youth. But D'Artagnan was encouraged by the success of the evening before and resolved not to yield an inch. So he held his ground firmly, and his opponent was compelled to retreat a single step. D'Artagnan, seizing this opportunity, made a lunge and wounded Bernajoux in the shoulder. Infuriated by this, Bernajoux made a wild thrust at D'Artagnan, and impaled himself on his sword. D'Artagnan pressed upon him closely, and doubtless would have despatched him, had not two of the guardsman's friends now joined in to help him. But Athos, Porthos, and Aramis also heard the noise and joined in the fray, and forced the two guardsmen to turn from D'Artagnan. At that instant Bernajoux fell. Then the cardinal's guards retired, carrying away the wounded man.

Excitement was at its height, but at that moment it struck eleven o'clock. So they quelled the commotion and proceeded to the hotel of M. de Treville, who

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had already heard of this fresh affair. They all hastened to the Louvre, but were surprised to hear that the king had gone hunting in the forest of St. Germain. On enquiry, they found that the cardinal had also gone.

"We are anticipated," said M. de Treville. "I shall see the king this evening, but, as for you, I should not counsel you at present to attempt it."

It occurred to him that it would be prudent to be in advance with his complaint. The wounded guardsman and his friends had taken refuge in the house of M. de Tremouille after the affair, since he was a strong adherent of the cardinal. But Treville relied upon that nobleman, who had the reputation of being an upright and just gentleman, and asked Tremouille to come with him to the bedside of the wounded guardsman.

The result was as Treville had foreseen. Lingering between life and death, Bernajoux had no idea of concealing the truth, and gave a true narration of the occurrence. So M. de Treville took leave of the now satisfied Tremouille and returned to his own hotel, where he invited the four friends to dine with him.

At six o'clock they all proceeded to the Louvre, and he waited in the king's ante-chamber with the four young men. The king had not yet returned from the hunt, but presently he was announced. This announcement caused D'Artagnan to shudder with emotion.

M. de Treville boldly entered the royal cabinet and found his majesty in a very bad humour. With the utmost composure, he enquired after his majesty's health.

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"Very bad," said the king, "I am dull and dispirited. There is the cardinal, who never leaves me any leisure, and who is ever talking to me of Spain, of Austria, and of England. But, talking of the cardinal, I am angry with you, M. de Treville. Was it for this that I created you captain of my musketeers—that they should assassinate a man and excite a whole neighbourhood? However you have probably come to tell me that you have committed the rioters to custody."

"Sire," said Treville, "I am, on the contrary, come to demand justice."

"Ah, this is something quite new," rejoined the king. "Do you pretend to say that your three musketeers, and your Gascon recruit, did not rush like madmen on poor Bernajoux and so ill-treat him that he is probably now dying?"

"And who has related to your majesty all this fine story?" quietly demanded Treville.

"The accusation comes from M. de Tremouille, from the duke himself. What do you say to that?" asked the king.

"Then I ask that your majesty will send for him, and question him face to face without witnesses, and I shall be content to be judged by what the duke may say."

"Yes," said the king, "I shall send for M. de Tremouille at once. To-morrow I shall see you again, Treville; come as early as you like, but I will not spare you if your musketeers have been guilty."

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"May God preserve your majesty till then!"

Treville slept little that night. Next morning he took the three musketeers and their comrade with him to the king's ante-chamber, so that, if the king wanted to see them, they would be ready at a call. Presently the door of the royal chamber opened, and M. de Tremouille left. "Ah!" said the king, advancing to the door, "it is you, Treville! Where are your musketeers? I commanded you the day before yesterday to bring them."

The musketeers approached with deep bows, D'Artagnan following behind.

"What! the devil!" continued the king, "seven of his eminence's guards doubled up by you four in two days! It is too many, gentlemen; at this rate, his eminence will have to renew his regiment in three weeks! There is a Gascon in the background there. Come here, you, sir!"

D'Artagnan gave an account of the adventure at the tennis-court, telling exactly how he had come to fight with Bernajoux.

"It is exactly so," murmured the king, "exactly as the duke recounted the affair. Poor cardinal! Seven men in two days!" He took a handful of gold, and gave it to D'Artagnan, saying, "There is proof of my satisfaction." D'Artagnan put the money in his pocket with warm thanks, for, at this time, the independent notions which are now current were not in fashion.

"Treville," said the king, "as there is no commission vacant in the musketeers, you may place this young man in M. des Essart's company of guards. Ah, I enjoy

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the thought of the grimace the cardinal will make. He will be furious."

Treville and his young men left, and he noticed D'Artagnan sharing with them the gold which the king had given him. The cardinal was really as furious as his master had anticipated, and for eight days he did not take part at the king's card table. Every time the king met him, he asked the cardinal:

"Well, M. le Cardinal! how is your poor Bernajoux and your poor Jussac?"

CHAPTER VII

The Court Intrigue.

D'Artagnan did not learn any more of his new friends. It was evident that they were of good origin, particularly Athos, who was reported to be a nobleman. But they were all obviously wrapped in mystery and the names of Athos, Porthos, and Aramis seemed to be assumed. On the advice of his friends, D'Artagnan engaged a servant called Planchet.

Meanwhile D'Artagnan was received as a recruit in Essart's company of guards. The three musketeers and their young companion were always seen together, so that the company of M. des Essarts appeared to have received four recruits, instead of one.

Nevertheless the king's gold did come to an end, and the four of them, like all gentlemen adventurers, were compelled after a time to live more plainly, and even to depend on the hospitality of friends for a meal. One day while D'Artagnan sat in his lodgings, there was a gentle tap at the door. Planchet introduced a man of plain and simple appearance, with the air of a merchant. He bowed to D'Artagnan.

"I have heard M. D'Artagnan mentioned as a brave young man," said the citizen, "and I have determined to confide a secret to him."

"Speak, sir, speak!" said D'Artagnan, who suspected something profitable.

The citizen paused, and continued, "I have a wife, and she is a seamstress to the queen. She was abduct-

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ed yesterday as she was leaving her work. I may tell you that it is a matter of politics, for she has been in the confidence of persons of very high station."

"How do you know all this?"

"My wife had been placed near her majesty in order that the poor queen, abandoned by the king and spied on by the cardinal, might have someone to confide in."

"Have you any idea who can have done this?"

"Yes, I suspect a man of aristocratic appearance, who has a dark complexion, piercing eyes, and a scar on his forehead."

"Why," cried D'Artagnan, "that must be my man of Meung! Can you vouch for all this?"

"I swear as surely as my name is Bonancieux"

"Pardon me interrupting you," observed D'Artagnan, "but the name seems familiar to me!"

"Yes, sir, I am your landlord."

"Ah, ah,!" said D'Artagnan, half rising, "so you are my landlord?"

"Yes, sir, and for the three months you have been in my house (diverted, no doubt, by your great occupations) you have forgotten to pay me my rent. As I have not asked you for payment, I thought you would have some regard for my delicacy in that respect."

The citizen drew a letter from his pocket. "I received this letter this morning," he said.

"Do not seek your wife," read D'Artagnan, *"she will be returned to you when she is no longer required. If you attempt to discover her, you are lost."*

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"Well, M. Bonancieux," said D'Artagnan, "this is indeed mysterious, and you may rest assured that I shall try my best to help you in this mystery."

When the landlord had departed, Athos and Porthos called to see D'Artagnan. He recounted to them the strange story of the disappearance of Madam Bonancieux.

"It is not for Madame Bonancieux that I distress myself," said he, "but for the queen, whom the king abandons, the cardinal persecutes, and who sees the execution of her truest friends in succession."

"But why will she love what we most detest—the English and the Spaniards?" asked Athos.

"Spain is her country, and so it is but natural that she should love her compatriots. Besides it is one Englishman with whom she is friendly, rather than the English."

"And truly," said Athos, "one must confess that that Englishman is well worthy of being loved. I never saw a man with such a noble air. I would not mind conducting him to the queen myself, if only to enrage the cardinal."

"Well," said the young Gascon, "it is thought by the queen that Buckingham has been persuaded to enter France by a forged message. She fears that the abduction of this woman has some connection with this, and perhaps with the presence of the Duke of Buckingham in Paris. Let us make enquiries and discover the citizen's wife, who has, I am sure, been taken away because she was a trusted adviser of her majesty."

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At that moment, hasty steps were heard, the door opened, and Bonancieux rushed into the room where this discussion was taking place.

"Oh gentlemen,!" cried he, "save me, save me! There are four men come to arrest me!" Porthos and Aramis rose and drew their swords.

As he spoke, four guardsmen appeared at the door, but hesitated to advance, on seeing the musketeers.

"We cannot assist you in prison," whispered D'Artagnan to the citizen, "and if we appear to defend you, we shall be arrested also." After some conversation with D'Artagnan, the officers carried their prisoner away.

"What villainy have you done now?" asked Porthos, when the friends found themselves alone. "Four musketeers to allow a miserable creature, who implored their assistance, to be arrested!"

But Aramis said, "Porthos, Athos has already told you that you are stupid, and I am of his opinion. D'Artagnan, you are a great man."

The four then parted, after taking a vow to hold together in the business which had commenced. With one voice they swore, "All for one; and one for all!" before retiring to their homes.

D'Artagnan did not stir much from his lodgings for a time. He found that four or five men had been left in ambush in the front room. All who called at the house were taken in and questioned. D'Artagnan had taken up some squares from his own floor overhead, so that he could hear everything which passed between the

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interrogators and the accused. The questions were usually:

"Has Madame Bonancieux entrusted you with anything for her husband, or any other person? Has M. Bonancieux entrusted you with anything for his wife, or any one else?"

One evening, he heard a woman's voice in the room below. He listened, and heard, "I tell you gentlemen, I am the mistress of the house; I am Madam Bonancieux."

"You are the very person we have been waiting for," replied the officers.

Violent struggling made the panels rattle, as if the victim was offering all the resistance a woman could. D'Artagnan seized his sword, and rushed downstairs. Then were heard loud outcries, the clashing of swords and crashing of furniture. Those who looked from their windows in surprise saw the door open, and four men in black fly like frightened crows down the street.

D'Artagnan was left with Madam Bonancieux. She was a charming woman of about twenty eight, but now was lying down almost senseless. Presently she recovered, and asked D'Artagnan, "What did these men want with me, and why is my husband not here?"

"Madam," reminded D'Artagnan, "We are scarcely in a situation suitable for confidences. The men I have put to flight will return reinforced. We must leave this place."

Together they left the house. "I had intended to send the news of my escape to M. de la Porte, who is in the queen's household at the Louvre. But I dare not go there until I know what has happened!" said Madame.

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D'Artagnan volunteered to find out for her, and take a message to La Porte. So after bestowing her in a safe lodging, he made his way to the Louvre, where he executed the commission.

La Porte made certain of the address of Madame Bonancieux. Then he said to D'Artagnan, "Young man, you may get into some trouble for this affair. Go and pay a visit to some good friend, that he may be able to witness that you were with him at half-past nine. This is in law what we call an *alibi.*"

D'Artagnan thought this prudent, so he went and asked for a short interview with M. de Treville, with whom he conversed a few minutes. M. de Treville did not see that, on entering the room, the wily Gascon put the clock back three quarters of an hour.

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CHAPTER VIII.

The Intrigue becomes Confused.

The following evening, D'Artagnan had to go to the Louvre to see his captain once more. On the way, he saw two persons whose appearance seemed familiar to him, a man and a woman. The woman seemed to resemble Madam Bonancieux, while the man, in the uniform of the musketeers, appeared to be Aramis. D'Artagnan followed them, and soon became convinced that the woman was indeed the wife of the citizen. He was consumed with curiosity.

He stopped in front of them, and they stopped also. "What do you want, sir?" asked the musketeer, in a voice with a foreign accent, which showed that D'Artagnan was deceived in thinking the man to be Aramis.

"It is not with you that I have anything to settle," said D'Artagnan, "but with the lady." For he wondered how she came to be walking with this gentleman, since he had imagined her to be still quietly in retirement.

"Come, madam," said the stranger, "and let us proceed." And he put D'Artagnan aside with his hand. D'Artagnan made one bound backwards and drew his sword. At the same moment, the stranger drew his.

"In God's name, my lord!" said Madame Bonancieux, throwing herself between the combatants and seizing their swords with her hands.

"My lord!" said D'Artagnan, enlightened by a sudden idea. "Pardon me, sir, but can you be—?"

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"My Lord Duke of Buckingham," said Madame Bonancieux, in a low voice, "and you may destroy us all."

"My lord, pardon me, and tell me how I may die in your Grace's cause," said D'Artagnan respectfully, sheathing his sword.

"You are a brave youth," said Buckingham, offering D'Artagnan his hand. "Follow us at a distance of twenty paces, and if any one follows us, kill him."

D'Artagnan followed out his instructions, and saw the young woman and the handsome musketeer enter the Louvre by a side gate. Then he returned to look for his three friends.

Madam Bonancieux opened a small private door, and led the duke along a dark passage, leaving him in a small room. "Remain here, my lord duke," said she, "some one will come immediately." Buckingham sat down and adjusted his beautiful fair hair, and arranged his uniform before a glass.

Presently a door opened, and a woman appeared; it was the queen. Ann of Austria was then in all the glory of her beauty, and looked every inch a queen. Buckingham remained for an instant perfectly dazzled, then knelt and kissed the hem of her robe.

"My lord, you already know that it was not I who sent for you from England ?"

"Oh, yes, madam. But my journey has not been entirely in vain, since I behold you now."

"My lord, you are well aware that calumny has fastened upon your follies. The cardinal has prompted the king, who feels extreme resentment. You remem-

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ber that when you wished to return as an ambassador to France, it was his majesty himself by whom you were opposed?"

"Yes," replied Buckingham, "and France is about to pay with a war for that opposition. What do you suppose is the true meaning of the expedition to Rhe, and the alliance which I am forming with the Protestants? It is because this war will bring a peace and there will be negotiations which will be conducted by none but me. I shall return to Paris and behold you once again, if but for an instant. Perhaps it will cost me my life, for strangely enough I have felt presentiments of an approaching death."

"Oh!" said Ann of Austria, "I have also dreamed that I saw you stretched on the earth, all bloody with a wound."

"Say no more," said Buckingham sadly. "Give me but some pledge of your regard, some object which has once been yours."

Ann of Austria returned to her chamber and came back in an instant with a small casket. "Here, my lord, are my diamond studs. Keep them as a memorial of me," she said, with emotion.

Buckingham left the room and found Madam Bonancieux waiting, who once again led him with extreme care out of the Louvre.

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CHAPTER IX.

The Cardinal.

There was in all this affair a person of whom we have taken little notice, M. Bonancieux, a martyr to the political intrigues of that chivalrous age. Now he was a prisoner in a dungeon of that terrible prison, the Bastille. At nine o'clock one evening, he heard steps in his corridor.

"Follow me," said a sergeant, who commanded the guard.

"Oh Lord!" murmured the poor man, "now I am lost." He followed mechanically and was taken to a closed carriage It could only be that they were taking him to St Paul, where criminals were executed! At last the carriage stopped, and two guards made him ascend a staircase where he was shown into a beautifully furnished room. There stood a man of middle height, with a proud and haughty air, piercing eyes and a thin countenance, and a large moustache.

This was Cardinal de Richelieu, one of the most unparallelled of mankind, now known by all Europe to be preparing to drive the English from the island of Rhe and undertake the siege of La Rochelle. He raised his eyes from his papers and plunged them like two daggers into the heart of the poor citizen.

"You are accused of high treason," he said. "You have conspired along with your wife, and with the Duke of Buckingham."

"I know nothing about it, my lord, though I have heard the name of the duke mentioned by her."

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"What did she say?"

"She said, my lord, that the Cardinal de Richelieu had enticed the Duke of Buckingham to Paris, to destroy him and the queen."

"She said that, did she?" cried the cardinal, with great violence.

"Yes, my lord, but I told her that his eminence was incapable—

"Hold your tongue—you are a fool!" replied the cardinal.

"That is exactly what my wife said to me, my lord."

Richelieu rang a little silver bell. "Go," he said to the officer who entered, "find Rochefort, and tell him to come here directly."

The person who now entered waited till the door had closed behind Bonancieux, then—

"They have met," he said eagerly, approaching the cardinal, "the queen and the duke."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes; at half-past twelve the queen was with her woman, and a pocket-handkerchief was brought to her from Madam Bonancieux. She arose and, in an agitated voice, said "Ladies, wait ten minutes for me." But she remained from the room for three quarters of an hour, and then returned to take a small rosewood casket, with which she went out again directly. Madam de Lannoy says it held the diamond studs which his majesty presented to the queen."

"Good, Rochefort. All is well. You may go now."

Then Richelieu sent for Bonancieux once more.

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"Yes, my friend, yes," said the cardinal, in that paternal tone, which only deceived those who did not know him; "you have been unjustly suspected and we must make you some amends. Here, take this bag of a hundred pistoles, and forgive me."

When Bonancieux was in the ante-room, the cardinal heard him, in his enthusiasm, crying out, "Long live the great cardinal!" He listened with a smile. "There goes a man," he said to himself, "who would henceforth die for me."

Then he wrote a letter and sealed it with his private signet, and rang his bell. The officer entered. "Tell Vitry to come here," said the cardinal, "and order him to be ready for a journey."

The man appeared soon, standing before him booted and spurred. "Vitry," said he, "you must go off at once, without an instant's delay, to London. You must not stop for one moment on the road, and you will give this letter to my lady."

The messenger, without a word, took the letter and left the room. Its contents were :—

"My Lady,

"Be present at the first ball where you can meet the Duke of Buckingham. He will have on his doublet twelve diamond studs; get close to him, and cut off two."

."As soon as the studs are in your possession, let me know it."

CHAPTER. X.

The Queen's Letter.

Having sought an audience of the king on the following day, the cardinal lost no time in putting his information to good advantage. After having asked to be alone with Louis, Richelieu said slowly, "Now that we are alone, we must have some serious conversation, if it please your majesty. The Duke of Buckingham has been in Paris for five days, and only left this morning."

It is impossible to form an idea of the impression which these few words produced on the king. He grew red and pale by turns. "I feel certain that he must have come to see the queen," said he. "If she is guilty, let her tremble."

'Your majesty's words remind me," said the cardinal, "that Madame de Lannoy told me this morning that the queen was up very late, and this morning she had been weeping and was writing throughout the day."

"That confirms it," said the king: "writing to him, no doubt. Cardinal, I must have the queen's papers! Let the keeper of the seals be sent for, with this commission. The matter is wholly within his scope."

Then, opening the door of communication, Louis entered the apartments of Ann of Austria. The queen was surrounded by her ladies, one of whom was reading aloud to her.

"Madam," said he, in a nervous voice, "you are about to receive a visit from the chancellor, who will make known to you my command."

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"But why, sire? What can the chancellor have to say that your majesty cannot tell me personally?"

The king turned away without any answer, and the chancellor entered the room. The queen seated herself and said in a tone of extreme haughtiness, "What do you want, sir, and for what object do you come here?"

"To make, madame, in the king's name, an examination of all your papers. In this, madam, I am but an instrument of the royal will."

The chancellor went through the formality of searching the desk, though he knew that it was not there that the queen would hide the important letter she had been writing.

"The king is certain, madame," said he, "that a letter has been written by you and has not yet been forwarded. It is not in your tables or desks; yet it must be somewhere."

"Well, it is true!" exclaimed the queen, and the spies of the cardinal have served him faithfully. "It is here!" and she placed her beautiful hand upon her bosom.

"I am authorised to seek that letter, even by a personal search of your majesty." The chancellor moved towards the queen.

Ann of of Austria—blanched as though it had been by the approach of death—supported herself by leaning her left hand on a table, then drew the paper from her bosom and presented it to the keeper of the seals. The chancellor, who was also trembling from an emotion easy to conceive, bowed to the very ground and withdrew.

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He carried the letter to the king, who saw by the first words that it was addressed to the king of Spain. It was a complete plan of attack against the cardinal. The queen invited her brother and the emperor of Austria to make a show of declaring war against France, and to lay down the dismissal of the cardinal as a condition of peace. The king immediately hastened to the cardinal :—

"Here, duke, you were right. The whole intrigue is political, and love was not the subject of the letter."

The cardinal read the letter. "Well, your majesty," said he, "you see how my enemies go. They threaten you with two wars if you do not dismiss me. But, sire, you have now incurred the anger of the queen. Permit me, then, to intercede for her with your majesty. You were wrong first, since you were suspicious of the queen. You know how the queen loves dancing. Give a ball, and her anger will not resist such an attention."

"Cardinal, you know I do not like these worldly pleasures."

"Her majesty will be all the more grateful to you, as she knows this. Besides it will enable her to wear those beautiful diamond studs which you gave her for her birthday, and with which she has not yet had any opportunity to adorn herself."

Ann of Austria, who, after the seizure of her letter, expected some reproaches, was much surprised to see the king make some attempts at a reconciliation. By the advice of her ladies, she appeared to be disposed to forgiveness. The king took advantage of this favourable moment to tell her that he thought of giving an immediate entertainment.

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Not a day elapsed but the king asked the cardinal when it was to be; and day by day his eminence deferred it upon some pretext or other. On the eighth day after the scene we have described, the cardinal received a letter with the London post-mark, containing only these few lines:—

"I have got them, but cannot leave London for want of money. Send me five hundred pistoles, and in four or five days I shall be in Paris." .. ..

Richelieu counted the days on his fingers, and then went to the king. "Sire," said he, "the city magistrates give an entertainment on the 3rd of October. This will suit exactly, for you will not have the appearance of going out of your way to please the queen." Then the cardinal added:—

"Do not forget to tell her majesty the evening before the fete that you wish to see how the diamond studs become her."

It was the second time that the cardinal had recalled the king's attention to these diamond studs. His majesty suspected that this must conceal some mystery, and thought that he would now give the queen the information which he had been charged to make on the eve of the ball.

"Madame," said he, with dignity, "there will soon be a ball at the Hotel de Ville. I desire you to be present at it, in state dress, and wearing those diamond studs which I gave you on your birthday."

The queen at once thought that his majesty knew all her secret, and became excessively pale, gazing at the king with terrified eyes. "Yes, sire, I hear you,"

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she said in a low voice. "But on what day will this ball take place?"

"I shall ask the cardinal, madame. It is he who has told me of the ball, but I do not exactly remember the precise date."

"I am lost," thought the queen, "for the cardinal evidently knows all." She curtseyed to the king, as he departed. Then she gave way to sobs and tears.

"Can I be of any service to your majesty?" said a voice full of gentleness. The queen turned, and saw Madame Bonancieux. She had been arranging dresses in a cupboard, when the king entered, and, being unable to get out, had heard the whole of the conversation.

"Yes," continued Madame Bonancieux, "there are traitors here, but I swear that I am devoted to your majesty. These diamond studs the king mentioned,—you gave them to the Duke of Buckingham, did you not?"

"Oh! my God, my God!" muttered the queen, her teeth chattering with affright.

"These studs," said Madame Bonancieux, "must be got back again. Some one must be sent to the duke. But two words from your majesty's hand, and under your own private seal; I shall see that they are delivered."

The queen ran to a small table, on which there were pen, ink, and paper, and wrote two lines, which she sealed and handed to Madame Bonancieux. Her faithful seamstress kissed the queen's hand, concealed the letter in her bosom, and disappeared with the lightness of a bird.

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Madame Bonancieux had intended to send her husband on the important mission to Buckingham. But she found out from his conversation that the man was now filled with admiration of the cardinal, and so was not to be trusted. Hence she thought of the gallant young musketeer, who had already saved her from the cardinal and his agents.

Then she confided in D'Artagnan the secret, part of which had been by chance already disclosed to him. D'Artagnan glowed with pride. The confidence he had in himself made him feel like a giant.

"I will interview M. de Treville this evening, and secure leave of absence," said he. "Then I shall leave for England at once."

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CHAPTER XI.

The Voyage to England.

D'Artagnan went straight to M. de Treville. The musketeer captain had always been kind to him, was entirely devoted to the king and queen, and so cordially hated the cardinal that the young man decided to tell him all the affair. He then said:—

"Without you, I am powerless. I wish you to obtain for me urgent leave of absence for fifteen days. This very night I must leave Paris."

"Then," said Treville solemnly, "you will not get past Bondy. There ought to be at least four, in order that one may succeed. I can give leave of absence also to Athos, Porthos, and Aramis. Go and find them immediately and tell them."

The three musketeers were amazed when each received intimation of leave, for which they had not applied. Porthos said:

"It appears there is something fresh in the wind?"

"Yes," said D'Artagnan, "it is a campaign which we are about to undertake, and a very dangerous one, I forewarn you."

At two o'clock in the morning, our four adventurers left Paris, by the Port St. Denis. Their servants followed them, armed to the teeth. At Chantilly, where they arrived at eight o'clock, they entered the inn and sat at the table. A gentleman was already seated there breakfasting, who drank to

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their healths, and they returned his politeness. But at the moment when they were about to leave, the stranger proposed to Porthos to drink the cardinal's health. Porthos replied that he desired nothing better, provided the stranger would also drink the health of the king. But a quarrel started, and the stranger drew his sword.

"You have done a foolish thing," said Athos, "but you cannot draw back now. Kill him, and come after us as fast as you can." So all three mounted their horses, and departed at full speed. But Porthos did not overtake them on the way.

About a league from Bouvais, at a point where the road narrowed between two banks, they met eight or ten men engaged in digging holes and making fearful muddy ruts. Aramis, fearing to dirty his boots, addressed them rudely. Then the workmen began to rail at the travellers, and even ruffled the temper of the cool Athos, who urged his horse against one of them. At once each man drew back to the ditch and took from it a musket that was concealed there. Aramis received a ball through the shoulder.

"This is an ambuscade," said D'Artagnan, "let us not waste powder, but away."

Aramis, wounded as he was, seized the mane of his horse, which carried him off with the others. "Ah, they will kill poor Porthos when he comes up," said he.

At Crevecoeur, the next town, Aramis could go no further. So they left him at an inn along with his servant, Bazin, and set off again in hopes of reaching Amiens by night. They arrived there at midnight, the

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party now without Porthos and Aramis, and dismounted at an inn called *The Golden Lily*. The host wished to lodge the two travellers each in a charming room, but at opposite ends of the hotel. But they declared they would rather sleep in the common room, on mattresses on the floor.

The night passed without incident, and Athos went to settle the account. The innkeeper was in a lower room, which the musketeer was requested to enter. He took the money from Athos and cried out that it was bad and that he would have him arrested for passing false coin. Four armed men rushed in at once and fell upon Athos.

"I am seized," shouted Athos, "away with you, D'Artagnan; spur on!"

D'Artagnan and Planchet mounted their horses, and went off at full gallop. "Brave Athos!" said D'Artagnan. "Well! The same thing awaits us, perhaps, at ten paces hence. Forward!"

At St. Omar they rested their horses and ate a morsel standing, after which they set off again. Near Calais, the horse of D'Artagnan fell down, but they were only a hundred yards from the town. So they left the horses and ran towards the harbour. Planchet pointed out to his master a gentleman who had just arrived there before them, all covered with dust, and was enquiring whether he could not cross over to England at once.

"Nothing easier," said the master of a vessel which was just ready for sailing, "but an order arrived this morning to let no one leave without permission from the cardinal."

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"I have got that permission," said the gentleman, drawing a paper from his pocket. "Here it is."

"Get it countersigned by the governor of the port," said the master, "and then give me the preference."

"Where shall I find the Governor ?"

"Only three quarters of a mile from the town, in his country house; see, you may distinguish it from here—yonder slate roof at the foot of the little hill."

"Very well," said the gentleman, and, followed by his servant, he took the road to the governor's house.

D'Artagnan and Planchet followed him at a distance. Once out of the town, D'Artagnan hurried forwards and overtook the gentleman, just as he entered a small wood.

"I am sorry, as you appear to be in a hurry," said D'Artagnan, "for as I also am in a hurry, I want you to let me pass through the straits before you."

"Impossible!" said the gentleman, "I have done sixty leagues in forty-four hours, and I must be in London to-morrow."

"I am grieved, sir," said D'Artagnan, "but I mean to go over first. I want that order you have in your pocket, and must have it."

"Let me pass, sir! Lubin, bring my pistols."

Planchet rushed on Lubin, laid the man on his back, and placed his knee on his chest. Seeing this, the gentleman drew his sword and fell on D'Artagnan, but he had to do with rather a tough customer. In three seconds, D'Artagnan gave him three wounds, saying at

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each thrust, "One for Athos, one for Porthos, and one for Aramis."

At the third stroke, the gentleman fell like a log. D'Artagnan felt in the pocket where he had seen him place the order for the passage, and found it. It was in the name of the Count de Wardes.

Then they tied Lubin, the servant, to a tree, and made at once for the house of the governor. At the country house of that worthy functionary, D'Artagnan gave his name to the servant at the door as the Count de Wardes.

"Have you an order signed by the cardinal?" asked the governor. "It seems that his eminence wishes to hinder some one from reaching England."

"Yes," replied D'Artagnan, "a certain D'Artagnan who left Paris with three of his friends, intending to go to London."

The governor then countersigned the order for D'Artagnan, who lost no time in useless compliments, but bowed and took his leave. On their return to the port, the barque was ready to sail; D'Artagnan handed over the pass, and soon they set off. The next morning at break of day, he found himself only three or four leagues from the shores of England. At two o'clock they cast anchor in the harbour of Dover, and soon D'Artagnan landed exclaiming:

"Here I am at last!"

They hired horses, and in a few hours reached the gates of London. The duke was hunting at Windsor with the king. D'Artagnan found the duke's confidential valet, who spoke French perfectly, and told him that

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he came from France on a matter of life and death. So the valet, Patrick, ordered two horses to be saddled. Poor Planchet was quite exhausted, and they left him behind, but D'Artagnan seemed to be made of iron. Soon they reached Windsor Castle.

"Whom shall I announce to my lord?" asked Patrick.

"The young man," said D'Artagnan, "who sought a quarrel with him one evening on the street outside the Louvre."

Buckingham, on receiving this message, at once remembered D'Artagnan and rode to him at full speed. D'Artagnan handed him the queen's letter.

"Just Heaven! what do I read?" exclaimed Buckingham. "Patrick, remain here; or, rather, find the king and tell him that an affair of the greatest importance has called me back to London."

CHAPTER XII.

The Countess de Winter.

As they rode back, the duke heard from D'Artagnan all that he knew. He heard with astonishment of the numerous attempts to stop the young man on his way to England.

Arriving at the duke's mansion, they jumped from their horses, and Buckingham dashed towards the staircase. He took the young Gascon to a private room and produced the casket which contained the diamond studs.

"The queen gave them to me," he said, "and she takes them away. Her commands shall be obeyed in everything." Suddenly he uttered a terrible cry. "All is lost!" he said, becoming as pale as death. "Two of the studs are gone."

"Has your grace lost them, or do you suppose that they have been stolen?" asked D'Artagnan, in consternation.

"Stop!" said the duke. "The only time I have worn them was at a ball a week ago. The Countess de Winter approached me during the ball. That woman is an agent of the cardinal's."

"What, has he agents all over the world?"

"Yes, but we will defeat him yet," said Buckingham, grinding his teeth with rage. "There are five more days; it is more time than we shall need. Patrick, bring my jeweller and my secretary!" The secretary arrived first, and Buckingham wrote out some orders in his own hand.

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"Jackson," said he, "you will go to the Lord Chancellor and tell him that I charge him with the execution of those orders. No vessel must leave a British port, and this is as I have decided on an act of hostility against France." He turned to D'Artagnan: "If the studs have not yet gone to France, they will not arrive till after you."

At this moment, the jeweller entered. He was an Irishman who was most skilful in his profession, and confessed that he gained a great sum every year from the Duke of Buckingham.

"O'Reilly," said the duke, "look at these diamond studs, and tell me what they are worth apiece, and how many days would be required to make two more of them."

The goldsmith glanced at the elegant manner in which they were mounted, and replied that they were worth fifteen hundred pistoles each, and that it would require a week to make two more.

"I will pay three thousand pistoles each for them, but I must have them the day after to-morrow."

The jeweller knew the duke, and that all remonstrance would be useless. So he sent for his most skilful apprentice and an assortment of diamonds, as well as the necessary tools. In half an hour, a chamber had been converted into a workshop for him, and a sentinel was placed at each door with strict orders to allow no one to pass, except Buckingham's valet, Patrick.

At eleven o'clock the second day, the diamond studs were finished, and so exactly imitated the others that Buckingham himself could not distinguish the new from the old. He immediately summoned D'Artagnan:

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"Here," said he, "are the diamond studs which you have come to fetch; witness that I have done everything that human power could accomplish. Go now to the port and ask for the ship *Sund*, and give this letter to the captain. He will take you to a small harbour where you will certainly not be expected. When you reach there, the landlord of the inn has a command to have a horse ready and saddled for you, and you will find four fresh horses ready at various stages on the road. If you leave at each stage your address in Paris, the four horses will follow you there. These four horses are equipped for the field; proud as you are, you will not refuse to accept one, and to present the three others to your companions."

Opposite the Tower of London, he found the vessel, and prepared to sail almost immediately. The next morning at nine o'clock, he landed at St. Valery and went to the appointed inn. The host at once took him to the stables where stood a horse ready saddled.

"Go from this place to Blangy, and from Blangy to Neufchatel," said he. "There go to the tavern of the *Golden Harrow*, and you will find, as here, a horse ready. Everything is paid for most liberally; go then, and God protect you!"

In four hours he was at Neufchatel, where he found another saddled horse waiting for him.

D'Artagnan went on again at full speed. At Ecouis the same scene was enacted; he left his address as before and departed for Pontoise. There he changed his horse for the last time, and at nine o'clock entered the courtyard of M. de Treville's hotel at full gallop.

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The next morning, nothing was talked of in Paris but the ball which the magistrates were to give to the king and queen. For the last week, every preparation had been in progress for this important entertainment. The company began to arrive at six o'clock, and were at once conducted to the places prepared for them in the grand saloon.

Half an hour after the arrival of the king, fresh acclamations announced the arrival of the queen. The moment that she entered, a small door opened, and the pale face of the cardinal appeared. A smile of terrible joy passed across his face; the queen was without her diamond studs.

The queen bowed submissively, and retired. The cardinal approached the king, and gave him a box, in which his majesty found two diamond studs. "If the queen has the studs, sire, which I doubt," said he, "count them, and if you can only find ten, ask her majesty who can have robbed her of these two."

The queen reappeared, and her costume of a huntress fitted her most charmingly. Over her left shoulder glittered the studs, suspended by a bow. The king trembled with joy, and the cardinal with anger. Still the question remained, were there ten or twelve? After the dance, the king advanced quickly towards the queen. "I thank you, madame," said he, "but I believe you have lost two studs, and I bring them to you." He offered her the two studs he had received from the cardinal.

Then the king counted them and found that there were twelve studs upon her majesty's shoulder. He summoned the cardinal.

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"Well, what does this all mean, cardinal?" he demanded.

"It means, sire," answered the cardinal, "that I wished her majesty to accept these two studs, but not daring myself to make the offer, I adopted this method."

"And I am the more grateful to your eminence," replied the queen with a smile, "as I am certain that these two studs have cost you more than the other twelve cost his majesty." Then she curtseyed to the king and the cardinal, and withdrew to remove her ball costume.

The queen had retired to her apartment, when D'Artagnan felt some one slightly touch his shoulder. He saw a young woman, who made him a sign to follow her. He recognised his guide as Madame Bonancieux. With a slight gesture of command, she pushed him into a small room which was empty. Voices soon told him that he was in a room adjacent to that of the queen's apartment. Although D'Artagnan did not know the queen, he distinguished her voice from that of others, first by a slight foreign accent, and then by her tone of command, characteristic of the speech of sovereigns.

Suddenly, however, a hand and arm of an adorable form were passed through the tapestry. D'Artagnan comprehended that this was his reward; he threw himself upon his knees, respectfully seized the hand and pressed his lips upon it, when it was withdrawn, leaving a ring in his. He put the ring on his finger, and silently departed.

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CHAPTER XIII.

After the Ball.

Next day he found M. de Treville in the greatest joy. The king and queen had been very gracious to him at the ball.

"My young friend," said Treville, lowering his voice, "it is evident that your safe return is connected with the king's joy, the queen's triumph, and his eminence's humiliation. You must take care of yourself. Hide that ring which I see on your finger, for everyone knows that a Gascon youth does not find such gems in his mother's jewel case."

D'Artagnan related some of the adventures on the road. Once more, Treville looked very grave. "There again!" he said. "De Wardes—one of the cardinal's men. Come, while his eminence is seeking you in Paris, you had better take the road to Pickardy and endeavour to find out what has become of your three companions."

This advice seemed good to D'Artagnan, since he had already called at the lodgings of each of the three friends and found that none of them had returned. During the day, he had received the following note, in which he recognised once more the hand of the queen's confidant, Madame Bonancieux, and had resolved to keep the appointment. She had said:

"Warm thanks are to be transmitted to you. You must be at St. Cloud this evening, opposite the pavilion at the corner of M. D'Estree's house."

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Accordingly he proceeded, accompanied by Planchet, to St. Claud, and waited. The pavilion was situated in a lonely place, and not a sound was heard. In a few minutes, the belfry of St. Cloud slowly struck the hour of ten. A light was seen in the pavilion, and D'Artagnan waited a good half hour in impatience.

D'Artagnan began to fear that something had happened to the queen's waiting woman. So he drew himself up by the branch of a tree, and gazed into the window where he had seen the light in the pavilion. He looked upon a scene of frightful disarray. The door of the room had been broken open, a table which had been covered with supper lay on the ground, with glasses in fragments and crushed fruits. Everything indicated a desperate struggle. Looking around outside the room, D'Artagnan found confused impressions of the footsteps of both men and horses.

He ran up the highway, and could see only a dark and deserted cottage. He knocked, and an old man appeared. D'Artagnan related what he had seen in the pavilion, in the hope that this man could give him some information.

"Yes," said the old man, sadly, "about nine o'clock, three men came here, bringing a closed carriage. Then I heard a woman screaming and the sound of breaking furniture. After that the three men carried a woman in their arms to the carriage and drove rapidly away."

D'Artagnan then saw that he could do no good, for the unfortunate lady had once again fallen into the hands of the cardinal's agents. He returned home to his lodgings, covered with mud.

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By this time, the fine horses, on which D'Artagnan had galloped from the ship to Paris, had been sent after him according to the duke's promise. So on the next morning, D'Artagnan, taking Planchet and the four horses with him, set out in search of his missing friends. They arrived without any incident at Chantilly, where Porthos had been left behind. D'Artagnan made some enquiries from the host.

"Ah! yes," said mine host, "I recollect it. It is of M. Porthos that you speak! He has done us the honour to remain here, for M. Porthos had the misfortune to be wounded, though he has strongly enjoined me to say nothing about it."

D'Artagnan found Porthos lying down, while his servant was cooking a magnificent dinner. He uttered a loud and joyful cry at the sight of D'Artagnan. "Welcome! Welcome! Excuse me for not rising to meet you; you know what happened to me?"

"No. I asked for you, and came up here directly."

Porthos appeared to breathe more freely.

"It happened that, in lunging at my adversary, to whom I had already given three wounds, my foot caught against a stone and sprained my knee."

"So that it is this sprain which keeps you in bed, my dear Porthos?"

"Yes, but in a few days I shall be on my legs again."

Then D'Artagnan related to him how Aramis had been wounded and obliged to stop at Crevecoeur, and that Athos had been left fighting at Amiens with four men who accused him of being a coiner, and that he himself had been compelled to run the Count de Wardes

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through the body, in order to reach England. Then D'Artagnan once more took the road with Planchet.

He passed over the six or eight leagues which separated Chantilly from Crevecoeur, arrived at the tavern where he had left Aramis, and reined in at the door.

"My good lady," said D'Artagnan, to the hostess who received him, "can you tell me what has become of one of my friends, whom I was obliged to leave here about twelve days ago?"

"Yes, sir, he is still here. At this moment he has with him the curate of Montdidier and the abbot of Amiens. Towards the end of his illness, he decided to become a priest."

D'Artagnan made his way to the bedroom of Aramis, and found that this was the case.

"You are come just in the nick of time, my dear D'Artagnan," said Aramis, "these two gentlemen and myself are engaged in arguing certain theological questions." The two men in black launched a hostile glance at D'Artagnan.

D'Artagnan was bewildered. And now a long and learned argument arose between the three, to which he listened helplessly. At last the two clergymen departed, and D'Artagnan and Aramis were left together.

"Yes," said Aramis. "Do not speak to me of the things of this world, D'Artagnan. War and love are no longer for my thoughts."

"Let us waste no more time, then," said D'Artagnan, "but burn this letter which came to your lodgings in your absence."

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"A letter! What letter?" cried Aramis eagerly. Then he seized the letter which D'Artagnan drew from his pocket. Aramis read the letter, and his mood changed at once. "Thanks," he exclaimed, "she could not help it; she was compelled to return to Tours." And he embraced D'Artagnan. "Come," he said, "no more of this talk of ordination. Let us drink, and tell me a little of what has been going on in the world."

So next morning, they prepared to set out in search of Athos. Aramis sprang into the saddle with his accustomed grace and activity; but after some curvets and capers of the noble animal, the rider felt his pains so insupportable that he grew pale. D'Artagnan caught him in his arms and led him back to his room. "Never mind, my dear Aramis," he said, "take care of yourself. I will go alone in search of Athos."

He urged on his horse at a gallop; towards eleven in the morning they caught sight of Amiens; and at half-past eleven they were at the door of the fatal inn. "Do you know me?" he asked the landlord, who came forward to give him welcome.

"I have not that honour, sir," replied the latter, his eyes dazzled by the splendid equipage with which D'Artagnan presented himself.

"Well, then, two words will restore your recollection. What have you done with that gentleman against whom you had the audacity, about a fortnight ago, to bring an accusation of passing bad money?"

"Oh, sir," said the terrified man, "I had been informed by the authorities that a celebrated coiner would arrive at my hotel, with several of his companions disguised as musketeers. You know what happened, and

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your hasty departure seemed to justify my proceedings. The gentleman, your friend, after having disabled two of my men by pistol shots, beat a retreat. As he found behind him the cellar, he rushed into it and locked the door. So we left him alone. I went to find the governor, to whom I related everything that had taken place, but he seemed entirely ignorant of the matter and said that the orders we had received did not come from him."

"But Athos!" cried D'Artagnan, who became doubly bold when he found that the authorities disclaimed the affair: "what has become of him?"

"As I was in haste to repair the injury I had inflicted," replied the inn-keeper, "I hurried to the cellar to liberate him. But he was no longer a man—he was a devil! He said that, before he would come out, he must impose conditions. 'First,' said he, 'you must give me back my servant fully armed.' So his servant, Grimaud, was sent down to him, and his master then barricaded the door again and sent us about our business. So he is still in the cellar! From that time we lead the saddest life that can be imagined, for you must know that all our provisions are in the cellar. Our wine in bottles is there, and all other foods. So we have been obliged to refuse provisions and drink to the travellers who come here, and we lose custom every day. But hark! He is getting into a passion now!"

D'Artagnan did, in fact, hear a great noise proceeding from the cellar. He therefore rose, and, preceded by the landlord, approached the scene of action. Here were two English gentlemen who were highly exasperated; they had travelled a long way and were fainting with hunger and thirst.

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"But this is positive tyranny," cried they, "that this madman will not allow the good people the use of their own food and wine. We will break open the door, and, if he is too furious, we will kill him." D'Artagnan gave them a courteous greeting.

"What!" shouted out the hollow voice of Athos. "I think I hear D'Artagnan's voice."

"Yes," said D'Artagnan, "it is I." Then he turned to the two angry Englishmen, saying, "Let me arrange the matter. You shall have something to eat and drink directly, I give you my word."

In another instant the door was opened, and there was seen the pale face of Athos. D'Artagnan embraced him tenderly.

Then in the cellar they saw pools of oil and wine, the bones of all the hams that had been eaten, and a barrel of wine of which the tap had been left open. Of fifty sausages hanging on the beams, scarcely ten remained. The howlings of the landlord and his wife pierced through the vaulted ceiling of the cellar.

"Gentlemen," said the landlord, "I am wrong, I confess; but mercy is due to every sinner. You are noblemen, and I am only a poor inn-keeper. You will have mercy on me."

"Ah, if you talk in that manner," said D'Artagnan, "you will pierce my heart. Let us see; where is Athos's old horse?"

"In the stables."

"How much is he worth? Eighty pistoles, I think. You may keep him, and say no more about it."

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"What! do you mean to sell my horse?" said Athos—"On what shall I make the campaign?"

"I have brought you another, younger and handsomer," said D'Artagnan. "Let us now sit down and have something to eat and drink." This they did, and D'Artagnan recounted how he had left their two companions, Porthos and Aramis.

He related the story of Aramis, and said laughingly that that young man seemed to have been disappointed over a love affair. "But you will not understand that, Athos," he said, "you who have never loved."

"I shall tell you a story," said Athos gravely. "A great noble, who shall be nameless, once became enamoured at twenty five years of ago, of a young girl of sixteen, who was as beautiful as love. He was a man of honour, and he married her—the fool!"

"But why so, since he loved her?" said D'Artagnan.

"Well! one day she was out hunting with her husband," continued Athos, in a low voice, and speaking very quickly, "when she fell from her horse and fainted. The count, her husband, hastened to her assistance, and as she seemed half-suffocated by her clothes, cut them open with his dagger, so that her shoulder was exposed. Guess what was upon her shoulder, D'Artagnan?" said Athos, with a convulsive burst of laughter. "*A fleur-de-lys*; she was branded—the simple young girl had been a thief."

"O! my God! my God!" exclaimed D'Artagnan, astounded by this horrible adventure. He perceived that it was the mystery of Athos's own past life which he was hearing. But Athos changed the subject and they spoke no more of it.

CHAPTER XIV.

My Lady.

On the next morning, they set out. The peace which they finally settled with the landlord cost six pistoles, in addition to Athos's old horse. Soon they arrived at Crevecoeur and found Aramis awaiting them, and then all went on together in search of the simple Porthos. They found him sitting down to a fine dinner, and all did honour to the repast. On arriving in Paris, D'Artagnan found a note from M. de Essarts announcing that, as his majesty had determined on opening the campaign on the first of May, he must immediately make ready his equipment.

D'Artagnan had now time to think of the disappearance of his unfortunate friend, Madame Bonancieux, and wondered whether he could do anything to help her. She had certainly been carried off a second time, and so D'Artagnan once more visited the pavilion to see whether he might discover something. One day while so occupied, he saw a carriage drawn up in the road, and a richly dressed cavalier waiting at its door. An animated conversation was going on between this cavalier and the lady inside the carriage, who was very beautiful and appeared to be English.

The beautiful Englishwoman seemed to be very angry. She concluded by a gesture which left no doubt about the nature of the conversation: it was a blow with her fan, applied with such force that the little feminine toy flew into a thousand pieces. The cavalier burst into a roar of laughter, which seemed to exasperate the lady.

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D'Artagnan thought that now was the time to interpose; he therefore approached the other door, and said:—

"Madame, will you permit me to offer my service? It appears to me that this gentleman has offended you. Say one word, madam, and I will immediately punish him for his want of courtesy."

The lady looked at the young man with amazement. "Sir," she said, in very good French, "I would put myself under your protection with the greatest of pleasure, if the person with whom I have quarrelled were not my brother."

"What is this presumptuous fellow interfering about?" exclaimed the gentleman, whom the lady had claimed as her relation; "why does he not go on about his business?"

D'Artagnan grew angry, and more so when he saw that this was one of the two Englishmen who had been about to fight with Athos in the cellar of the Inn at Amiens. He seized him by the horse's bridle and stopped him.

"You perceive," said the Englishman, "that I have no sword with me. Would you show off your courage against an unarmed man?"

"I hope that you have one at home," said D'Artagnan; "Behind the Luxembourg there is a charming spot for meetings of the sort to which I am inviting you."

"Very well: I will be there, at six o'clock this evening."

"Probably you have one or two friends?"

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"I have three, who will consider it an honour to play the same game as myself."

"Three—capital! How well it fits in!" said D'Artagnan; "it is precisely my number."

"And now, who are you?" demanded the Englishman.

"M. D'Artagnan, a Gascon gentleman serving in the Guards, in the company of M. des Essarts: and pray, who are you?"

"I am Lord de Winter, Baron of Sheffield."

D'Artagnan pricked his horse, put him to the gallop, and took the road to Paris. He went straight to Athos's lodging, and told him all that had happened. Athos was quite enchanted when he found he was going to fight an Englishman, so they sent their servant to look for Aramis and Porthos, and to let them know what was in the wind.

At the appointed time they proceeded to an enclosure behind the Luxembourg, which was reserved for goats. The Englishmen were all persons of the highest rank, and the singular names of the three friends of D'Artagnan were therefore a subject of surprise to them.

Then eight swords were glittering in the rays of the setting sun, and a combat began with a fury that was natural enough between men who were double enemies. Athos was the first to bring down his adversary; Porthos next stretched his opponent on the grass; D'Artagnan played a defensive game till he saw that his opponent was quite weary, then, by a vigorous thrust,

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he disarmed him. Then pointing his sword to his throat, he said, "I could kill you, sir, but I give you your life for the sake of your sister."

The Englishman was enchanted at having to deal with so complete a gentleman. Then as Porthos and Aramis had also put their opponents out of action, they all left the field of battle.

"And now, young friend—for I hope you will permit me to call you by that name," said Lord de Winter, "I will, if you wish, present you this evening to my sister, for she has some influence at court and a word from her may be useful to you hereafter."

D'Artagnan glowed with delight, and gave an assenting bow. Lord de Winter arranged to call for D'Artagnan that evening, in order to present him, and this presentation to "My lady" occupied all the thoughts of the young Gascon.

Lord de Winter arrived at the appointed time, found D'Artagnan alone, and they set out at once. An elegant carriage with two excellent horses carried them to the Place Royale.

Her ladyship received D'Artagnan graciously. "You see," said Lord de Winter, "a young gentleman who had my life in his hands, but would not misuse his advantage, although we were doubly enemies, since it was I who had insulted him, and since I am also an Englishman. Thank him, therefore, madame, on my behalf, if you have any good-will for me."

The lady frowned; an almost imperceptible cloud passed over her brow; and then a smile so

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singular appeared on her lips that the young man, who saw the triple change, almost shuddered.

"Welcome, sir," said the lady, "for you have this day acquired an eternal claim upon my gratitude." But it was easy to see that the account was not agreeable to her. And, by the aid of a mirror, D'Artagnan was witness to a change which took place in her countenance. When she thought she was unobserved, her features assumed an expression which almost amounted to ferocity.

After half an hour's conversation, D'Artagnan was quite convinced that her ladyship was his own countrywoman. She spoke French with a purity and elegance that left little room for doubt. The hour for departure came at last, and D'Artagnan took leave of her.

On the following day, D'Artagnan returned and received a still more favourable reception. She seemed to take a great interest in him, enquiring who he was and who his friends were and whether he had ever thought of attaching himself to the cardinal's service. D'Artagnan, who, as we know, was very prudent for a youth of twenty, commenced to form some suspicions concerning her ladyship.

The lady changed the conversation, and, with the utmost indifference of manner, asked him whether he had ever been in England. He replied that he had once been sent over by M. de Treville to negotiate for a supply of horses, and had even brought back four as a sample. In the course of the conversation, her ladyship bit her lips three or four times: she had to deal with a youth who played a pretty close game.

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CHAPTER XV.

A Discovery.

A few weeks passed, during which D'Artagnan was a regular visitor on "my lady." He tried hard to find out from the waiting-maid whether any information was to be obtained as to the fate of Madam Bonancieux, but without success. But, one evening, D'Artagnan made another startling discovery; he saw a fashionably dressed young gentleman arrive and receive a very friendly reception. Instantly he recognised the unfortunate Count de Wardes, whom he had wounded and robbed of the cardinal's passport at Calais. So De Wardes had recovered from his wounds and was on excellent terms with my lady!

One evening when D'Artagnan arrived, the whole apartment was in darkness, the lamps not having been lit. An idea seized him, which he boldly determined to put into execution. As he entered, the lady called out:

"Who is it? What is that noise?"

"It is I," whispered D'Artagnan. "The Count de Wardes."

D'Artagnan entered the room, and was careful to talk in a low voice, lest she should perceive the deception.

"Ah, count," said the lady, "to-morrow you must let me have some souvenir, which will prove you think of me; and, as you might forget me, count, keep this."

And she slipped a ring from her own finger on to that of D'Artagnan. It was a magnificent sapphire, encircl-

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ed by diamonds. The first emotion of D'Artagnan prompted him to return it, but her ladyship added—

"Poor fellow! whom that monster D'Artagnan just missed killing. Do you still suffer from your wounds? Depend on it, I will take a cruel vengeance on him for your sufferings."

"Egad," said D'Artagnan to himself, "the time for my confession is scarcely come yet."

So he took his leave as soon as possible, and hastened to Athos, for, being engaged in such a singular adventure, he wished for his advice. He told him everything; Athos's brow was knitted often during the story.

"Your lady," said he, "appears to me to be an infamous creature; but you are not, on that account, the less wrong in thus deceiving her. You may now be sure that you will have a bitter enemy with whom to deal."

Whilst still speaking, Athos looked earnestly at the sapphire, encircled with diamonds, which D'Artagnan now wore in place of the queen's ring, which was carefully deposited in a case.

"You are looking at this ring," said the Gascon, proud of displaying before his friend such a splendid gift.

"Yes," said Athos, "it reminds me of a family jewel. And this ring was given you by her ladyship? Let me look at it."

D'Artagnan drew the ring from his finger. Athos examined it, and became very pale; he then tried it on the ring-finger of his left hand, and it fitted as if it had been made for him.

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"It is impossible that it can be the same," said he. "Yet it is strange that two jewels should be so singularly alike. I thought I recognised it. But stop; let me look at the sapphire again. The one I mentioned had one of its surfaces scratched by an accident."

They examined the sapphire. Athos trembled. "Look!" said he, "Look! Is it not strange?" And he pointed out to D'Artagnan the scratch that he remembered should be there.

For several days, D'Artagnan did not again visit the beautiful lady, of whom he had such suspicions. But one evening a letter was brought to him by her ladyship's waiting maid; he opened it and read as follows:

Dear M. D'Artagnan,

It is wrong thus to neglect your friends, especially when about to part for so long a time. I and my brother looked for you in vain, both yesterday and the day before. Will it be the same this evening?

Yours very gratefully,

LADY DE WINTER.

So, in spite of his good resolutions, D'Artagnan once more made his way to the abode of the Lady De Winter. To D'Artagnan's questions respecting her health, she replied, "Bad, very bad."

"Then," said D'Artagnan, "I am indiscreet in coming; you are unquestionably in want of a little peace, and I will immediately retire."

"No," said her ladyship, "remain, M. D'Artagnan. Your pleasing company will, on the contrary, give me great relief."

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Her ladyship assumed the most friendly air possible, and gave the utmost charm to her conversation. There was a moment when D'Artagnan experienced something like remorse for the deception he had practised on her. Then he wondered whether she would be disposed to give him another sapphire, equal to that which she had given him for De Wardes.

"I have an enemy," continued the lady "who has cruelly insulted me, and there is war to the death between us. Can I reckon upon you as an ally?"

D'Artagnan instantly perceived at what the vindictive creature was aiming. "You can, madam," he said emphatically; "My arm and my life belong to you."

" He is called De Wardes," she said ; "avenge me on him, as soon as possible."

"But perhaps this poor De Wardes was less culpable than you imagine," said D'Artagnan. "You had an interview with him last Thursday, in this very room, had you not ? And did you not give him a ring ? That ring I myself have ; the De Wardes of Thursday and the D'Artagnan of to-day are the same person."

The imprudent young man expected some surprise, mixed with bashfulness—a little storm which would dissolve in tears; but he strangely deceived himself and his error was quickly apparent. Pale and terrible, her ladyship raised herself up, and pushed away D'Artagnan with a violent blow on the chest.

D'Artagnan restrained her by her robe, in order to implore her pardon. By a powerful effort, she endeavoured to escape, and her robe gave way at the shoulder.

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Then one of her beautiful shoulders became uncovered, and D'Artagnan, with inexpressible horror, perceived upon it the *fleur-de-lys*—that indelible mark impressed by the degrading hand of the executioner.

"Ah, wretch," said she, "you have betrayed me like a coward, and moreover you have learned my secret. You must die!" She drew a small dagger with a long slender blade, and sprang at D'Artagnan. Instinctively he drew his sword, and she only stopped when she felt the sharp point on her bosom. He retreated backwards till he found the door. Then he fled, while she still menaced him with an impotent gesture.

D'Artagnan ran through half of Paris, and did not stop till he found himself at Athos's door. He mounted two flights of steps and knocked as if he would break down the door. Athos burst into a fit of laughter, which was occasioned by D'Artagnan's wild appearance—dress askew and moustache bristling.

"Well, speak now," said Athos, bolting the door; "is the king dead? Have you killed the cardinal? Come, speak, for I am dying with anxiety."

"Well then," said D'Artagnan, "prepare to hear something incredible. Her ladyship is branded with a *fleur-de-lys* on her shoulder."

"Ah!" exclaimed the musketeer, as if he had received a bullet in his heart. He groaned, and let his head fall upon his hands.

"Then it must be she! I must see her, D'Artagnan."

"Take care, Athos, take care. She is such a woman as would willingly pay you back also. However, happily, we both leave Paris the day after to-morrow, and shall probably go to La Rochelle. But such a woman

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would pursue us both to the end of the world, and I am certain that she is one of the cardinal's spies."

"In that case, take care of yourself. The cardinal does not greatly admire you for the London affair; he must gratify his revenge, so take care. Do not go out alone; if you eat, take every precaution; distrust everything."

"Well, Athos, take back your ring now, for I am sure you must prize it."

"*I* take it back, after it has passed through that wretch's hands! Never! the ring is polluted. We will sell it or pledge it; it is worth a thousand crowns."

This was accordingly done, and the two friends began to prepare themselves for the approaching campaign.

On the following morning, Planchet entered, bearing two letters addressed to D'Artagnan. One was a little note, delicately folded; the other was a large square envelope, glittering with the terrible arms of his eminence, the cardinal duke. D'Artagnan took the smaller note, and unsealed it hastily. It read so—

"Walk out about six or seven o'clock on Wednesday evening next on the Chaillot Road, and look carefully into the carriages as they pass...But, as you value your own life or mine, do not speak; do not make one motion which may show that you have recognised me."

There was no signature.

"It is a snare," said Athos; "do not go, D'Artagnan. At six or seven o'clock you would be as solitary on the Chaillot Road as if you went to walk in the forest."

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"But what if we should all go?" said D'Artagnan. "Surely they could not eat us all four, besides the four servants, the horses, and the arms; the act would certainly bring on a fit of indigestion."

"But this second letter," said Athos; "you forget that. And yet the seal indicates that it is worth opening."

D'Artagnan opened the letter, and read:

M. D'Artagnan of the King's Guards is expected at the cardinal's palace at eight o'clock this evening.

LA HOUDINIERE,
Captain of the Guards.

"Hum! I would not go," said Aramis. "A prudent man may excuse himself from waiting on his eminence, particularly when he has some reason to believe that he is not sent for to listen to compliments."

"Whatever may be the result, I will go," said the young Gascon. "If he sends me to the Bastille, you must get me out again."

So at five o'clock, all set out, mounted on magnificent horses and in their full uniform.

On the Chaillot Road, the day was beginning to decline. D'Artagnan, supported by his friends, looked eagerly into every carriage, but saw no face he knew. At length, after about a quarter of an hour's expectation, and as the twilight thickened around, a carriage was seen advancing at the utmost speed of the horses. At the same instant, a woman's head was visible at the window, with two fingers on her lips to enjoin silence. The woman, or rather the apparition, for the carriage

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passed with the rapidity of a vision, was Madam Bonancieux. The carriage proceeded on its way, soon entered Paris, and disappeared.

The three companions gathered round D'Artagnan. They had all seen a woman at the window, but none of them, except Athos, knew Madam Bonancieux by sight. Athos believed that it was really this lady whom they had seen, and thought that he had seen a second head at the back of the carriage.

"If that is so," said D'Artagnan, "they are undoubtedly conveying her from one prison to another. But what can they want to do with the poor creature?"

It had now struck half-past seven; his friends reminded D'Artagnan that there was another visit to pay, which it was not possible for him to decline. So they reached the cardinal's palace soon, and found there twelve musketeers who had been sent for. They communicated the business on hand to these brave allies.

D'Artagnan entered the ante-chamber and gave his letter to the officer on duty, who showed him into the cardinal's waiting room. Five or six of his excellency's guards were there, who, knowing that it was he who had wounded Jussac, looked at him with a singular smile. The smile seemed to D'Artagnan a bad omen. The officer returned and signed to D'Artagnan to follow him, and took him to a library, where he found himself before a man who was seated writing at a desk. This man raised his head and D'Artagnan recognised the cardinal.

Richelieu rested his elbow on his manuscript, and looked at D'Artagnan for an instant; the young man felt this gaze flowing through his veins like a river.

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"Sir," said the cardinal, "are you one, D'Artagnan, of Bearn?"

"Yes, my lord."

"Then it is you who set out from your native place about seven or eight months ago, to come and seek your fortune here. You were recommended to M. de Treville, and he had you placed in the company of guards of M. des Essarts?"

"Your lordship is perfectly correct."

"Since that time, many things have happened to you. You made a journey to England with your friends; they stopped on the road, but you continued your journey. On your return, you were received by an august person, and I see with pleasure that you have kept the souvenir which she gave you."

D'Artagnan put his hand on the diamond which the queen had given him, but it was too late.

"Come," resumed the cardinal, "what would you say to a commission in my guards, and a company at the end of the campaign? You accept, do you not?"

"Your goodness confounds me, my lord," replied D'Artagnan. "But all my friends are among the musketeers and the king's guards, and all my enemies are in the service of your eminence. Perhaps, hereafter, I may have the right to give myself away—at present, I should be supposed to sell myself."

"That is to say you refuse to serve me, sir?" said the cardinal. "Remain in freedom, then; I am not offended with you. But take care of yourself, M. D'Artagnan, for from the moment that I shall have

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withdrawn my hand from you, I would not give one farthing for your life."

"Let what may happen," said D'Artagnan, bowing, "I shall retain a sentiment of eternal gratitude to your eminence for what you have offered me at the present time."

D'Artagnan left the room ; but at the door his heart almost failed him, and he was strongly tempted to return. Yet the serious and severe countenance of Athos arose before his mind ; if he agreed to what the cardinal proposed, Athos would no longer offer him his hand. It was this fear that determined him, so powerful is the influence of a truly noble character over all that approaches it.

Before the door, Athos and his musketeers were awaiting him. When they were housed at Athos's, D'Artagnan merely told them that Richelieu had offered him a commission in the guards and that he had refused it.

"And you were right," exclaimed Aramis and Porthos with one voice. Athos fell into a profound reverie and said nothing. But, when he was alone with D'Artagnan, he said, "You have done as you ought, but perhaps you were imprudent"

The next day was occupied with preparations for departure. It was believed that the separation of the guards and the musketeers would be but temporary, and on the following day, at the sound of the trumpets, the musketeers assembled under M. de Treville and the guards under M. des Essarts, for the king to inspect them. The review being ended, the guards began their march, the musketeers being to set out only with the king.

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CHAPTER XVI.

The siege of La Rochelle.

The siege of La Rochelle was one of the greatest political events of Louis XIII. Of the important cities which had been given by Henry IV to the Hugenots, the French Protestants, La Rochelle alone remained. The cardinal wished to destroy this last bulwark of Protestantism; moreover this was the last port which remained open to the English in France, and it was thought that the English would give every support to the Hugenots, in order to maintain their hold there.

D'Artagnan, with the guards, arrived without mishap at the camp before La Rochelle, finding it necessary to be separated, for a time at least, from his three friends. On his first evening, he went for a walk along a pretty little path which led from the camp to an adjoining village. Engrossed in his thoughts, he walked further than he had intended, and, as day was declining, he saw by the last rays of the setting orb the barrel of a musket glittering behind a hedge.

He saw, with some anxiety, that it was aiming in his direction, so threw himself flat on his face. At the same instant the shot was fired, and he heard the whistling of the ball, as it passed over his head. He raised himself up with a bound, and a bullet from a second musket scattered the stones in the very part of the path where he had thrown himself down. He immediately scampered towards the camp, but the one who had fired first had time to reload his gun, and the ball passed through his hat, and drove it ten paces away from him.

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D'Artagnan reached his lodging, pale and out of breath. This might be a kind memorial of the cardinal, but that great man would hardly resort to such means towards people whom a movement of his hand could crush. It might be her ladyship's revenge!

Next morning, on parade, M. des Essarts called to D'Artagnan, and said to him :

"His royal highness, the Duke of Orleans, is about to ask for volunteers for a dangerous expedition ; hold yourself in readiness."

The Hugenots had, in fact, recaptured a bastion which the royal army had taken two days before. The idea was to send out volunteers to discover in what manner the enemy guarded this bastion. Presently his royal highness raised his voice and asked for volunteers.

"Here is your trustworthy man—here he is," said M. des Essarts, pointing to D'Artagnan; "as for the others, you have only to ask and men will not be wanting."

Two of D'Artagnan's comrades in the guards rushed towards him instantaneously; and two other soldiers having joined them, the number was complete. It was not known whether the Rochellois had left a garrison in the bastion, so D'Artagnan went off with his companions in the line of the trench. The two guards marched by his side, and the two soldiers in the rear. But, on nearing the bastion, D'Artagnan found that the two soldiers had disappeared. Believing them to have remained behind from fear, he continued his march. They came to within sixty yards of the bastion, but found no one, and the bastion seemed evacuated. But suddenly a circle

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of smoke appeared, and a dozen balls whistled round D'Artagnan and his companions.

One of the guards fell with a ball in his chest, and D'Artagnan bent to lift him up. At that moment, two shots were fired, one shattering the head of the wounded man, while the other was flattened against a rock two inches from D'Artagnan's body.

This attack had not come from the bastion, from which they were now hidden by the angle of the trench. D'Artagnan remembered the two soldiers who had deserted him, and thought of his assassins of the previous evening. He therefore fell over the body of his companion, as if he were dead, and immediately saw two heads raised above a mound about thirty yards from him. They were those of the two soldiers, who had remained behind for the purpose of assassinating him.

As he might only be wounded, they drew near to complete their work. When they were about three paces away, D'Artagnan arose and sprang on them. One of them dashed out in the direction of the bastion for safety, but the Rochellois who guarded it fired upon him, and he fell with his shoulder broken by a musket ball. The other man tried to defend himself with his empty musket, but soon fell with D'Artagnan's sword through his thigh, and found the point of the Gascon's weapon at his throat.

"Wretch," cried D'Artagnan, "speak quickly; by whom were you hired to assassinate me?"

"A woman whom I do not know, but who was called 'my lady.' My comrade knew her, and called her so," said the wounded wretch. "It was with him that she

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arranged this affair, and he has the letter from her in his pocket now."

With an active step, and keeping his eye on the bastion, D'Artagnan managed to advance out where the wounded man was lying. He raised the man up and carried him on his back, to search him at leisure in the trench. He threw the body of the assassin on his shoulder just at the moment that the enemy fired, and a tremor and a final shudder of agony proved that he who had sought to assassinate him had now saved his life.

Arriving in the trench, he threw down the body by the side of the wounded man and searched his pockets. There was a purse with a considerable sum of money, and papers, amongst which he found the following letter:

"Since you have lost track of the woman and she is now in safety in the convent, take care at any rate not to miss the man, otherwise you know that I have a long arm; and you shall pay dearly."

There was no signature, but it was evident that the letter was from her ladyship. He questioned the wounded man, who confessed that he and his dead comrade had also been engaged to carry off a young woman. But they had failed, as the queen had discovered the prison to which Madam Bonancieux had been sent, and had rescued her from it. Thus the letter which he had previously received, and her presence in the carriage on the Chaillot road, were explained to him.

D'Artagnan then returned to camp, allowing the wounded wretch to accompany him. He did not denounce the man, since he apprehended no further dan-

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ger from him, and thought he might now cease to be disturbed. Alas! this proved that D'Artagnan did not yet thoroughly estimate her ladyship.

The following evening, a letter was delivered to D'Artagnan. It came from the musketeers' station at Villeroi, and read as follows:

"*M. D'Artagnan,*

M. Athos, Porthos, and Aramis had a very fine dinner at my house, and have now left. I now execute the order they gave me, to send you a dozen bottles of my Anjou wine, which they greatly admired.

Your most humble servant,
GODEAU,
The host of the Musketeers.

"Good!" said D'Artagnan, "they think of me amid their pleasures." So he invited a few of his companions in the guards to come and drink some of the delicious wine of Anjou with him. Planchet made arrangements for the dinner, and the wounded assassin, who was now wholly devoted to D'Artagnan for having spared his life, was also present. This man, whose name was Brisemont, helped in pouring out the wine, which was somewhat disturbed by the shaking of the journey. D'Artagnan permitted the wounded Brisemont to drink some, for the poor wretch was still very weak.

As the guests had finished their soup, and were raising the first glass of wine to their lips, a great outcry was heard. They all rushed out, and found that the

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king had just arrived with his musketeers. The ceremony of receiving them was soon over, and D'Artagnan was once more united to his three friends.

"Well, I hope that dinner is ready, and that you have some good wine in this paltry place," said Athos, after the first greetings were over.

"Why, there is your own, my dear friend," answered D'Artagnan, "the wine of Anjou which you sent me. At any rate, it is the wine that was sent by your orders."

The three musketeers were puzzled, and none of them seemed to understand what D'Artagnan meant. All denied having sent it.

"Let us run, my friends," said D'Artagnan. "A horrible suspicion crosses my mind; can this, too, be another of that woman's acts of vengeance?" He sprang towards the dining room, followed by the three musketeers.

The first object that met their sight, on entering the room, was Brisemont, extended on the floor and writhing in most horrible convulsions. It was evident that all aid was useless, for the features of the dying man were contracted with agony.

"Ah!" cried he, when he perceived D'Artagnan, "you pretended to forgive me, and you poison me. You gave me this wine and told me to drink it."

"Well," said D'Artagnan to Athos, "you see, my dear friend, "it is war to the death."

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CHAPTER XVII.

The Red Dove-Cote Tavern.

One evening, when D'Artagnan was in the trenches and could not accompany them, Athos, Porthos, and Aramis, mounted on their chargers, were returning from a tavern called the *Red Dove-Cote*. As the moon emerged from behind a cloud, they saw, coming round a turn of the road, two horsemen, who halted, and appeared to deliberate whether to advance or retreat. Athos advanced, and cried out, "Who goes there? Answer, or we charge."

"Who are you?" came back a voice, in commanding tones. "Reply, or you may find yourself in some trouble."

"King's musketeers," replied Athos, convinced that he who thus questioned him had the right to do so.

"Your name?" said the strange officer, who kept his face covered with his cloak. Then he let his cloak fall a little, so that his face might be seen.

"The cardinal!" cried the astonished musketeer.

"Your name?" repeated his eminence again.

"Athos, your eminence."

"Then follow me; I do not wish it to be known that I have left the camp. Undoubtedly your two companions are Messrs. Porthos and Aramis. Do me the honour, therefore, to accompany me with your two friends, and I shall have an escort which might excite the envy of his majesty, should we meet him."

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They soon arrived at the silent, solitary tavern. The landlord was unquestionably aware what an illustrious guest he had to receive, and had dismissed all troublesome persons. The cardinal knocked three times in a peculiar manner. The landlord opened the door to him, and they all entered, leaving their horses outside.

The three musketeers were shown into a large room, where a closed iron stove had lately been replaced by a large and excellent chimney. "Be pleased to wait for me, gentlemen," said the cardinal. "I shall not be more than half an hour." He himself, without requiring any direction, ascended the stairs like a man who has no need to be told the way.

Porthos and Aramis placed themselves at a table and began to play dice, while Athos walked up and down the room in deep thought. As he walked and meditated, he passed and repassed before the funnel of the stove we have mentioned, which had been broken off. It went into the apartment above. Each time that he passed, he heard the murmur of speech, which at last attracted his notice. He made signs to his two companions to be silent, and remained with his ear bent down to the level of the lower opening of the funnel.

"Listen, my lady," said the cardinal. "The business is important. Sit down and let us talk about it."

"My lady!" muttered Athos.

"I am listening to your eminence with the greatest attention," said a voice which made him start.

"A small vessel with an English crew awaits you at the mouth of the river Charente; it will sail to-

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morrow morning. Two men whom you will find at the door here will escort you."

"Yes, my lord. Now, as to my commission, will you deign to explain it in clear and precise terms, in order that I may not make any error?"

"You are going to London," said the cardinal; "on arriving there, you will seek out Buckingham. But you have no occasion this time to gain his confidence; you will present yourself frankly as an ambassador. Tell him I am aware of all the preparations he is making, but that I do not much disturb myself about them, since, at the first step which he ventures, I shall destroy the queen. Tell him I can prove not only that her majesty can love the enemies of the king, but also that she can conspire with the enemies of France."

"But," said my lady, "if, in spite of this, the duke should not surrender, but should continue to menace France?"

"Well, for example," said Richelieu, "when for a cause similar to that which now actuates the duke, Henry IV was about to invade Flanders and Italy, did not an event occur which saved Austria? Why should not the king of France have the same good fortune?"

"Your eminence alludes to the knife of the assassin, Ravaillac, who struck down Henry IV? Is your eminence not afraid that the fate of Ravaillac may deter those who might be tempted to follow his example?"

"In all countries, there are always fanatics who are content to be regarded as martyrs. The Puritans are furious against the Duke of Buckingham, and their

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preachers speak of him as the enemy of Christ." She remained in silent thought.

"Well," continued the cardinal, in a careless tone, "it would be only necessary to find some young, beautiful, and clever woman, to put the knife in the assassin's hand. She would never be discovered."

"Then, your eminence," said she, "I require an order, ratifying beforehand whatever I may think it necessary to do for the prosperity of France."

"But we must find the woman I alluded to, and also the fanatic who will serve as the instrument of God's justice."

"She is found, and he shall be found," said the lady. "And now, since I have received your eminence's instructions with regards to your enemies, permit me to say a few words regarding mine. There is first a little busybody of the name of Bonancieux. She was in prison, but the queen has inveigled an order from the king, by the assistance of which she has had her removed to a convent. Then there is the wretch, D'Artagnan, the evil genius of both of us."

"He is a bold fellow, that," said the cardinal, "and I can have him sent to the Bastille. But I see no objection to giving you what you demand; give me a pen, ink, and paper."

There was a momentary silence, and Athos took a hand of each of his companions, who by now were also listening, and led them to the other end of the room.

"Hush!" he said in a whisper, "we have heard all that is necessary. Tell the cardinal I have gone in advance to clear the way for him, since, from certain words

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of the landlord's, I have been led to believe that the road is not quite safe."

Then he went boldly out, took his horse without any concealment, and told the cardinal's equerry that he was going as an advance guard along the road.

Presently the cardinal opened the door of the room where Porthos and Aramis were, and found them engaged in a most earnest game of dice. They told him for what purpose Athos had gone on before.

"To horse, then, gentlemen, for it is getting late."

They resumed their journey, taking the same precautions as they had done before. Meanwhile Athos, waiting in a small coppice, saw the party pass him, and immediately galloped back to the tavern. The landlord recognised him again.

"My officer," said Athos, "has forgotten a commission of importance for the lady on the first floor, and has sent me to repair his forgetfulness."

He ascended the stairs with his lightest step, and perceived, through the half-open door, that the lady was fastening on her hat. He entered the room and closed the door behind him. Enveloped in his cloak, and with his hat drawn down over his eyes, Athos stood upright before the door. On seeing this figure, mute and motionless as a statue, the lady was alarmed.

"Yet, it is indeed she!" muttered Athos. "Do you recognise me, madame?" The lady took one step forward, and then recoiled as though she had seen a serpent.

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"The Count de la Fere!" she said, growing deadly pale, and drawing back till the wall prevented her retreat.

"Yes, my lady," replied Athos, "the Count de la Fere in person, who returns from the other world to have the pleasure of seeing you. Let us sit down, then, and converse, to quote the cardinal."

Impelled by terror, her ladyship sat down without uttering a word.

"You are a demon let loose upon the earth," said Athos. "I thought I had crushed you, and now hell seems to have given you new life, but it has not removed the brand from your body or the stains from your soul. You thought me dead and I thought you dead; the name of Athos concealed the name of the Count de la Fere, and the name of the Lady de Winter has concealed Ann de Breuil."

"But, after all," said the lady, in a hollow voice, "what brings you here, and what do you want from me?"

"I want to tell you that, although invisible to you, I have never lost sight of you. I know that it was you who cut the two diamond studs from Buckingham's shoulder, who stole away Madame Bonancieux, who entertained D'Artagnan believing him to be De Wardes, and then sent two murderers to have him assassinated. It was you who sent the poisoned wine, and who have just made an engagement with Cardinal Richelieu to have the Duke of Buckingham assassinated, in exchange for his undertaking to allow you to assassinate M. D'Artagnan."

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Her ladyship was livid. "You must indeed be Satan!" said she. "But D'Artagnan has cruelly insulted me, and must die."

Athos rose and drew a pistol from his belt, which he cocked; he slowly raised it till it almost touched the lady's forehead, and then, in a voice of intense calmness, said:

"Madame, you must immediately give me the paper which the cardinal wrote just now, or I will blow out your brains. You have one second in which to decide."

With any other man she might have hesitated, but she knew Athos. She hastily drew the paper from her bosom, and handed it to him. Athos unfolded it, and read:

"It is by my order, and for the good of the State, that the bearer of this did what he has done.

Richelieu."

He left the room, went downstairs, and at once sent his horse on at a gallop. Only, instead of keeping to the road, he went by the fields, until at last he heard the sound of several horses on the road, and knew it to be the cardinal's party. Then he placed himself in the middle of the road, not more than two hundred paces from the camp.

"Who goes there?" cried he, when he heard the horsemen.

"It is our brave musketeer," cried the cardinal. "M. Athos, accept my best thanks for your care; we have now reached our destination." He bowed to the

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three friends, and turned off to the right with his equerry.

They sent a message for D'Artagnan to come to them. In the meantime, her ladyship in the *Red Dove-Cote* was in great doubt whether to seek another interview with the cardinal, but dared not risk disclosure of her past life from Athos. So she thought it better to depart discreetly on her mission, and hope for the cardinal's help in executing her vengeance when she had succeeded.

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CHAPTER XVIII.

The Bastion of St. Gervais.

On arriving at his friends' quarters, D'Artagnan found them all assembled in one room. Athos was thinking, Porthos was twisting his moustache, and Aramis was reading his prayers in a charming little book, bound in blue velvet.

"Aramis," said Athos, "you breakfasted in the *Parpaillot* tavern the day before yesterday, I believe. Were you quite free there, and did no one disturb you?"

"There were not many idlers," replied Aramis; "Yes, in fact, for what you want, Athos, I think we shall do well enough in the *Parpaillot*."

They arrived at the tavern at seven in the morning, and the friends ordered breakfast in a room where the landlord assured them they would not be disturbed. But the hour was unfortunate, for the morning drum had just beaten, and many of the troops were coming to the tavern. Dragoons, Swiss, light cavalry and musketeers, all entered by turns. Their private talk had to be given up.

"Well," said one of the light cavalry, "you have been in the trenches, you gentlemen of the guards?"

"Did you not take a bastion?" asked a Swiss soldier.

"Yes," replied D'Artagnan, for the remarks were addressed to him. "We were in the bastion of St. Gervais, where we lost five men, and the Rochellois eight

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or ten. We also introduced a barrel of gunpowder under one of its angles, and the whole of the building is much shaken."

"But," said the light horseman, "it is probable that they will send pioneers to repair the bastion this morning."

"Yes, it is probable," said D'Artagnan.

"Gentlemen, I have a wager to suggest," said Athos, speaking to the Swiss, the light horseman, and a dragoon, who had joined the group. "I bet that my three comrades and myself will go and breakfast in the bastion of St. Gervais, and that we will stay there for one hour, no matter what the enemy may do to dislodge us."

The wager was quickly accepted by the Swiss and the light horseman, while the dragoon nodded his agreement, and the stakes were fixed at a dinner for eight. Athos then ordered the landlord of the inn to pack up their breakfast in a large basket, and add two bottles of wine. Then he compared the time of his watch with that of the dragoon, and ordered his servant, Grimaud, to take up the breakfast. Then, bowing to the party, the four young men took the road towards the bastion of St. Gervais, followed by Grimaud with the basket.

"And now, my dear Athos," said D'Artagnan, "why are we going to breakfast in the bastion, rather than in the *Parpaillot*?"

"Because we have most important things to tell you, and it was impossible to converse for five minutes in that tavern, with so many people continually accosting us. Here at least," said Athos, pointing to the bastion, "we shall not be interrupted."

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Looking back to the camp, they saw that a group of more than three hundred had assembled to watch them, and Athos waved his hat to them. A loud hurrah came back to their ears, as they all entered the bastion.

There they found a few bodies, French and Rochellois, and about a dozen of their muskets. So they set to work to load all the muskets, while Grimaud prepared the breakfast, and all assembled round it.

"And now," said D'Artagnan, "as you are no longer afraid of being heard, I hope that you are going to let me know your secret."

"I saw her ladyship last night," said Athos.

D'Artagnan was just conveying his glass to his lips; but at the mention of her ladyship's name, his hand trembled so that he placed his glass on the ground, in order that he might not spill its contents. "In that case, I am a lost man," said he.

"Not just yet," replied Athos, "for, by this time, she must have quitted the shores of France, although last night she was demanding your head of the cardinal."

At that moment Grimaud came up and announced that a party of twenty men was approaching the bastion. So Athos arose, took the first musket which came to his hand, and went to a loophole. An instant later, they saw the troop appearing. Athos mounted the wall, his musket in one hand and his hat in the other, and courteously addressed the advancing party of soldiers and pioneers, who were astonished at this apparition:

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"Gentlemen, some of my friends and myself are breakfasting in this bastion. Now you know that nothing is more disagreeable than to be disturbed at breakfast, so please wait till we have finished our repast, unless you desire to forsake the ranks of rebellion and drink with us to the health of the King of France."

At that moment, four shots were fired, and the bullets whistled round Athos, without touching him. The four friends within fired at once in return; three soldiers fell down, and one of the pioneers was wounded. A second discharge followed the first, and the leader of the party fell dead, whereupon the rest of the troop took to flight.

"Reload the muskets, Grimaud," said Athos, "and, gentlemen, let us continue our breakfast. Ah, as I was saying, my lady is now on her way to England, where she is to assassinate the Duke of Buckingham, or have him assassinated."

"The creature is a very demon!" said Porthos, holding his plate to Aramis, who was cutting up a fowl.

"Look at this," said Athos, and he drew the precious paper from the pocket of his coat. D'Artagnan unfolded it with a trembling hand, and read:

"It is by my order, and for the good of the State, that the bearer of this has done what he has done.

Richelieu.

"To arms!" cried Grimaud. They all arose hastily.

This time, a larger band of enemies was approaching, all soldiers of the garrison. Porthos prudently sug-

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gested that it was now time for them to return to camp, as the match was unequal.

"Impossible for three reasons," answered Aramis. "The first is that we have not finished our breakfast; the second is that we have still some important affairs to talk about; and the third is that it still wants ten minutes before the hour has elapsed."

So they arranged their muskets and kept up a rapid fire as soon as the soldiers of the Rochellois came within range. Many men fell, but the rest continued to press on to the very walls of the bastion. Then the musketeers pushed down large parts of the already loosened wall upon their attackers, and fearful cries were heard from beneath. Soon the few survivors were seen in rapid retreat towards the town. Then Athos looked at his watch.

"Gentlemen," said he, "we have now been here for an hour, and won our wager. Let us finish our breakfast and listen to an idea which has come to Aramis. He thinks that we must warn the queen of this treacherous conspiracy."

"That is the best plan we can devise," said Aramis, "we must inform the queen and the Lord de Winter at the same time. The letters must be written this very day, and, as we cannot leave the camp, we must send our servants on the journey."

But now there were signs that the Rochellois were sending a whole army against the bastion, for the red uniforms and black hats became distinctly visible. So Grimaud cleared up the breakfast things and they all commenced a retreat. But Athos insisted on mounting

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the wall to remove the white handkerchief, which he had fastened there as a flag. The Rochellois opened a sharp fire on him, but it seemed that he bore a charmed life, for the bullets whistled round him harmlessly.

Meanwhile the whole camp was in a commotion. More than two thousand persons had witnessed, as at a theatre, the bravado of the four friends—a bravado of which they were far from suspecting the true motive. When they returned to receive the noisy congratulations of all their friends, the tumult became so great that the cardinal supposed there was a mutiny, and sent the captain of his guards to ascertain the cause of the disturbance.

CHAPTER XIX.

A Family Affair.

Next day, the four friends put into execution the scheme they had formed on the previous day. There was great discussion as to the nature of the letter to be sent to Lord de Winter. In the long run, Aramis turned out the following lines, then, in a soft and slow voice, read them to the others :

"*My lord,*

The person who writes these lines had the honour of crossing swords with you once. As you have often been kind enough to declare yourself the friend of that person, he is bound to send you in return an important warning. You have twice escaped being the victim of a near relation, whom you consider your heiress, because you know not that, before contracting her marriage in England, she had been previously married in France. Your relative has left La Rochelle for England. Watch for her arrival, for she has great and terrible designs. If you really wish to know what she is capable of, read her history on her left shoulder."

Then they turned their attention to the other communication, the warning to the queen. Aramis resumed his pen, began to reflect again, and wrote the following lines, which he submitted immediately to the approbation of his friends :

"*My dear Cousin,*

His eminence the cardinal, whom God preserve, is about to exterminate the rebellious heretics of La

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Rochelle. It is probable that the aid of the English fleet will not even arrive in time ; I might almost venture to say that his grace of Buckingham will even be prevented from leaving England by some great event. I dreamed that this Englishman was dead, and you know that my dreams are always fulfilled."

Planchet was entrusted with the letter for England, while Aramis's servant, Bazin, at once set out for Tours. The friends put all their money into a common fund, for indeed they were as members of one family now. Planchet was given instructions by all the friends as to the importance of the letter he was to deliver.

The four friends, during the whole time of the servants' absence, had their eyes more than ever on the watch and their ears on the alert. The days were consumed in trying to catch every report, in watching the movements of the cardinal, and in scenting out the courtiers who arrived. More than once, an unconquerable anxiety seized them, on being sent on some unexpected service.

On the morning of the eighth day, Bazin, smiling as usual, entered the room at the *Parpaillot* where the four friends were sitting down to breakfast, saying :

" M. Aramis, here is the answer from your cousin."

Aramis took the letter, and blushed in spite of himself. He handed it to Athos, who cast a glance over the letter and then read it aloud :

" Cousin,

My sister and I understand dreams very well, and are frightened of them, but of yours it may be said—

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I hope—all dreams are false. Adieu! take care of yourself, and write to me from time to time."

Bazin, by his return, had removed part of the suspense which tormented the four friends. But it would be at least eight days more before Planchet could possibly return, and D'Artagnan could have sworn that each of these days was eight and forty hours long. Athos, alone, of the four friends, remained unmoved, as though no danger filled the air around him and he breathed in his habitual atmosphere.

They expected Planchet on the sixteenth day after his departure, but on the evening of that day there was still no sign of him. At the last drum, they left the *Parpaillot* to go to bed. But behold, suddenly, in the obscurity, the shadow was perceptible of a form familiar to D'Artagnan and a well-known voice said to him:

"Sir, I have brought your cloak, for it is cold this evening."

They proceeded to their quarters, to read the letter that Planchet had brought. It contained half a line in a hand truly British, and of a brevity truly Spartan:

"*Thank you; be easy.*"

Then they all went to bed to sleep well, admitting to each other that it would be the first time they had done so for sixteen days.

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CHAPTER XX.

Fatality.

In the meantime, her ladyship, furious with rage, was pacing on the deck like a lioness, for she could not endure the thought that she had been insulted by D'Artagnan and threatened by Athos, and was now leaving France without her revenge. The wind was contrary and the sea was rough, and so it was only on the day that Planchet embarked at Portsmouth for his return to France that the messenger of his eminence triumphantly entered that port. Just as they were preparing to land, a small vessel steered towards them, and there came on board an officer, with eight men. They inspected the ship's papers, and then all the passengers were called on deck. Her ladyship did not fail to scrutinise the officer most intently; he was a man of about twenty-five years of age, with blue eyes, rather deeply set.

The officer had her ladyship's luggage indicated to him, and ordered it to be put in his boat, and then, offering her his hand, requested her to descend herself.

"You see, my lady," said he, "it is the custom in time of war that strangers shall be supervised, in order that they may, until information is obtained concerning them, remain under the inspection of the Government."

So they proceeded to the shore, where the officer sprang upon the quay and gave his hand to her ladyship. A carriage was awaiting them there, and she entered with a resolute step; the officer took his seat beside her and the coachman set off at a gallop. After

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about a quarter of an hour, she could perceive that they had left the town, and she shuddered and said:

"For heaven's sake, sir, is it to your government or to some enemy that I am to impute this violence which is offered me?"

"No violence is inflicted madam, and this is a very simple measure which we are forced to pursue towards all who land in England."

After about a hour's drive, the carriage stopped in a large gloomy courtyard. The officer invited his prisoner into what was evidently a castle, and led her to a room which had been prepared for her. The bars in the windows and the locks outside the doors showed that it was a prison.

The officer presided over all details with the same calmness, not speaking a syllable, but directing his men by a gesture of his hand. At the same instant, the door opened and a man appeared upon the threshold. He was without a hat, carried a sword by his side, and, as he gradually came within the rays of the lamp, her ladyship involuntarily recoiled.

"What! my brother," she exclaimed, overwhelmed with astonishment, "is it you?"

"Yes, fair lady," replied Lord de Winter, making her a bow, half courteous and half ironical, "myself. This castle is mine, and you are, for the time being, my prisoner."

Her ladyship felt relieved that she had only fallen into the hands of her brother-in-law, rather than into those of some other enemy.

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"You have made up your mind, then, to return to England," said Lord de Winter, "in spite of the determination you expressed in Paris, never again to set your foot upon the territory of Great Britain?"

"Why, I have come to see you," replied the lady, ignorant of how much, by this answer, she aggravated the suspicions which D'Artagnan's letter had excited in her brother-in-law's mind.

"Oh!" said Lord de Winter, with apparent good humour, "I suspected this wish to see me, so, to save you all the fatigue of landing, I sent one of my officers to bring you. I put a carriage at your disposal, and I have had an apartment prepared for your reception. I am the governor of the port here, and when the list of passengers from your ship was brought to me, I recognised your name."

Cold drops rolled down the lady's forehead. "You are jesting," said she, "and I think you are a coward to raise your hand against a woman."

"And, if I did, I should have an excuse. Besides, mine would not be the first man's hand that had been laid on you, I imagine." And the baron, by a slow accusing gesture, pointed to the lady's left shoulder, which he almost touched with his finger.

Her ladyship uttered a hoarse cry and retreated to the further corner of the room, like a panther about to spring. Her eyes shot forth such lightning glances that, although he was an armed man, he felt the chill of fear penetrating his soul. Nevertheless he continued:

"O, roar as much as you please! Only do not try to bite, for I warn you that will be the worse for you and the judges will hand you over to the executioners,

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who will make your two shoulders alike. At present, you will continue in this castle, where the walls are thick, the doors are strong, and the bars are solid. As for the officer who holds the command here in my absence, you have seen him. You have already tried the power of your seductions over many men and have always succeeded, but if you succeed with this man, I shall believe you to be the very fiend himself."

Her ladyship appeared to submit to this like a resigned victim. It was impossible to see a softer or more submissive expression than that which reigned upon her beautiful face. Lord de Winter left the room, making a sign to Felton, who followed him and closed the door. Her ladyship slowly raised her face, which had assumed a formidable expression of menace and defiance; ran to the door and listened, and then sank down into an easy-chair to abandon herself to anxious consideration.

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CHAPTER XXI.

Milady's Imprisonment.

Milady remained in the same desperate position, and realised that all her misfortunes unquestionably came from D'Artagnan. He knew her brother-in-law, and must have written to him. Yet, to avenge herself, she must be free; and for the prisoner to be free, there is a wall to pierce, bars to loosen, and these are enterprises which the patience and force of a man may accomplish, but before which a woman is helpless. Beside she had but ten or twelve days left.

The bolts were drawn; the door grated on its hinges; steps were heard in the corridor. "Place the table there," said a voice, which the prisoner recognised as that of Felton, now making arrangements for her supper. My lady stirred in her chair:

"Oh, my God! what I have suffered!" she murmured in that harmonious voice of hers, which fascinated all whom she desired to destroy. And she raised herself up in a most graceful attitude. "Am I to remain always alone in this large melancholy room?"

"You may have a woman to attend on you," said Felton.

"I thank you, sir," said the prisoner humbly. At that moment, Lord de Winter entered.

"So," he said laughing, "these beautiful locks, so skilfully displayed, that delicate complexion, and that languishing look, have not melted your stony heart?"

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"No, my lord," replied the unfeeling young man, "and, believe me, it requires more than the petty stratagems and affectations of a woman to corrupt me."

Lord de Winter took Felton by the arm, and led him away, laughing, to supper.

"I am undone!" she muttered, "I am in the power of people over whom I shall have no greater influence than statues of bronze or granite." But, before she retired to rest, she concluded that Felton was the more vulnerable of the two. The man, weak or strong, seemed to her to have a ray of pity in his soul, and she determined to spare no effort to take advantage of it.

Next morning she complained of feeling unwell, and expressed a desire for a physician. Then she declared:

"But for what purpose? No doubt these gentlemen will also prejudice my doctors. I feel my sufferings, that is all; give me what you please—it is of little consequence to me."

Her ladyship was not deceived. Felton reappeared, and ordered the attendants to remove the breakfast table. Then, holding a book in his hand, he waited till everyone had left the room, and said:

"Lord de Winter, who, like yourself, is a catholic, has imagined that the loss of the ceremonies of your religion must be painful to you: he therefore permits you to read the mass, and here is a book which contains the ritual."

From the manner in which Felton placed the book on the table near her ladyship, and the tone in which he pronounced the word "mass," as well as from the contemptuous smile, her ladyship raised her head and

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looked attentively at the officer. Then, by the stiff method of wearing the hair, by the dress of exaggerated simplicity, she recognised in him one of the gloomy Puritans, whom she had often observed in the court of King James. She experienced one of those sudden inspirations which are reserved for geniuses alone, in times of great crisis, and the answer came readily to her lips :

" I ?" said she, with contempt, " I, sir ! Lord de Winter, the corrupted Catholic, knows well that I am not of his religion, and it is a snare which he wishes to spread for me."

" And of what religion are you then, Madame ?" he asked, with an astonishment which he could not perfectly conceal.

" I am in the hands of my enemies," she continued, in the tone of enthusiasm which she knew was popular among the Puritans. " Well, either may my God save me, or may I perish for my God. Carry this book away and make use of it yourself, for you are undoubtedly the accomplice of Lord de Winter—an accomplice in his persecution and an accomplice in his heresy."

He went away, taking the book with him. Having now found his vulnerable spot, my lady allowed Felton to find her at prayer when supper was served, prayers which she had picked up from an old Puritan servant of her second husband. Then, after the supper had been cleared away, she started to sing in her pure harmonious voice the first stanza of a psalm, which was then in great favour among the Puritans :

" Thou leavest us, O Lord
To prove if we are strong

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But then thou dost afford
The need that to exertion should belong.
For all my fears and cares
For exile and for chains
I have my youth, my prayers
And God, who keeps a record of my pains."

The door opened suddenly and her ladyship saw Felton, his countenance as pale as ever, but with flashing and almost delirious eyes.

Her ladyship looked beautiful at that moment, and the religious enthusiasm which she had assumed had given such an expression to her countenance that Felton, completely dazzled, fancied that he now saw the angel whom he had before only heard. Feeling that he could not preserve his severity towards such a prisoner, he rushed out of the room.

Next day, about noon, Lord de Winter entered. "Patience, patience!" he said. "In four days you shall be permitted to go, and the sea will be open to you—more open, perhaps, than you would wish—for England will be rid of you."

As he went out, a piercing glance through the half-opened door enabled her to see that Felton was listening, so she fell on her knees and began to pray:

"O God, Thou knowest for what sacred cause I suffer; therefore give me strength to bear my trials."

The door opened softly and Felton entered. She threw herself at his feet. "O, you are a just man!" she exclaimed. "I can no longer restrain myself; listen

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to the supplication of a woman in despair. They have deceived you; help me!"

"You are mistaken, Madame; and must speak to my superior. I always wait for confidence, and, except what Lord de Winter has said in your presence, he has told me nothing."

"Then perhaps you are not his accomplice? You do not know that he designs for me disgrace and horror?—but the friend of that wretch is capable of anything."

"And whom do you call 'wretch?'" asked Felton.

"Are there, then, two men in England to whom the term can be applied? I mean him whom the pagans and the infidels call the Duke of Buckingham," said the lady. "O, my God, how I beseech Thee to inflict upon that man the punishment that he deserves. I seek no gratification of my own revenge, but I implore the deliverance of all the people."

"Do you know him, then, Madame?" inquired Felton.

"Yes, I know him! Oh yes! to my eternal misfortune." Slow steps were heard along the corridor; it was Lord de Winter approaching. "O, not one word," she cried. "Tell not to that man one word of what I have said to you, or I am lost." Then, as the steps came nearer, she pressed her beautiful hand on Felton's lips, with a gesture of infinite terror. But Lord de Winter passed by the door without stopping, and his departing steps were heard in the distance. Felton, pale as a corpse, breathed deeply and rushed out of the room.

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In the evening, Lord de Winter came into her room when supper was served. He sat down and produced a paper from his pocket, which he slowly unfolded. "Here," said he, "is a passport which I have myself drawn up, an order to convey to an unnamed place Charlotte Backson, branded by the justice of the kingdom of France, but liberated after punishment."

She remained silent from fear, for she thought that the warrant was to be immediately executed. He continued:

"Do not deceive yourself, for the warrant will be sent to the Duke of Buckingham to-morrow for his signature, and, on the following day, shall be carried out." Then Lord de Winter bowed sarcastically to her ladyship and left the room.

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CHAPTER XXII.

The Fourth Day of Imprisonment.

When Felton entered her room the next day, my lady continued in a mood of exalted religious enthusiasm. She ventured on a more direct appeal to him now, but he said:

"I am a soldier, Madame, and I execute the orders that I have received."

"And do you believe that, on the day of final judgment, God will make any distinction between the executioner and the unrighteous judge? You make yourself the instrument of him who wishes to kill my soul."

She saw that he was agitated, and she walked towards him with a glance illuminated by that fire which had already carried disorder into the senses of the young Puritan, uttering in her sweet voice:

"To Baal his victim send;
To lions cast the martyr;
Yet vengeance is God's charter;
To him my cries ascend."

Felton stood petrified. "What are you?" he exclaimed, clasping his hands, "angel or demon?"

"I am but a daughter of the earth, a sister of your faith, and nothing more. And yet you are the accomplice of that child of Belial whom men call Lord de Winter, and you are delivering me up to him who fills and pollutes the world with his heresies, to the infamous Buckingham."

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Felton was deeply moved, for he, as a Puritan, looked upon Buckingham with all the aversion of his own severe religious party. Many of them believed that Buckingham was no less than an emissary of Satan.

"Speak!" he said, "confide in me as a brother!"

At this moment, the step of Lord de Winter was heard. But the dreaded brother-in-law was not contented this time with merely passing the door; he stopped, and, after speaking to the sentinel, he opened the door and entered. He let his glance travel from the prisoner to the young officer.

"You have been here a long time, John," said he. "Has this woman related her crimes to you? If so, I can comprehend the duration of the interview." And he took the officer by the arm, looking over his own shoulder, so as not to lose sight of the lady whilst he was in the room.

"Come, come," said the baron, as he left the room, "you will not escape to-night."

Two hours after, just on the stroke of twelve, the sentinel was relieved, and Felton entered the room. "I have come," he said. "You promised that you would confide in me."

"Felton," said her ladyship, with a melancholy solemnity, "supposing your sister, the daughter of your father, should say to you—'Whilst still young, and, unfortunately, beautiful, I was decoyed into a snare, but I resisted—temptations were multiplied against me—the religion that I serve was blasphemed because I called it to my aid . . .'"

"And what did you do at last?" said Felton, breathlessly.

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"At last they called in deceit, and mixed a powerful drug with my drink. I was carried away to the luxurious home of the wicked man who had conspired against me."

"But who was your persecutor; who was that man?" demanded Felton.

She did not answer his question. "After he found that even imprisonment would not break my spirit, he decided to disgrace me in the eyes of the world, by marking me like the basest criminal. One night in my imprisonment, they entered my room, and my persecutor brought with him a man with a mask."

"Oh, his name!" cried Felton, in a new outburst of rage, "tell me the name of that man."

"Then, in spite of my cries, in spite of my resistance —for I began to understand that something worse than death was meditated against me—they threw me on the floor and bound me. Then, whilst I was suffocated with sobs and almost senseless, and calling on that God who would not listen—I uttered suddenly a fearful shriek of agony and shame. A burning instrument, the brand of the executioner, had been stamped on my shoulder."

"Look!" said her ladyship, rising with the majesty of a queen; "look how a new martyrdom has been invented for a pure girl, the victim of a monster." With a rapid motion, she tore the robe from her shoulder, and, covered with simulated shame, showed to the young man the dishonourable mark there.

"Forgive me, O forgive me," said Felton, and he covered her hand with kisses. "Only tell me the name of your persecutor."

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"The true criminal," said the lady, "is the plunderer of England, the persecutor of all true believers, he who may protect the protestants to-day, but to-morrow will betray them—Buckingham."

"Oh!" said Felton, "you shall live and be avenged," Then, with a light of resolution in his eyes, he left the room.

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CHAPTER XXIII.

The Escape.

In the morning, her ladyship entertained a hope that Felton would visit her at breakfast time. But at six o'clock, Lord de Winter entered, armed to the teeth.

"So," he said, "you had begun to corrupt my poor Felton, and he has already felt your infernal influence, but you shall see him no more. You may pack your clothes, for to-morrow you set out; that is all determined upon." With these words he left the room, and she spent the day in suspense.

Her ladyship had listened with a smile of scorn on her lips, but fury in her heart. She felt that she needed strength, for she knew not what might be the events of the night, which was soon to approach in gloom. Huge clouds were already careering in the skies, and the thunder bellowed in the air like the angry passions of her soul. Her ladyship found some consolation in seeing Nature partake of the commotion in her own breast.

Suddenly she heard something strike against the window, and, by the light of the gleaming flash, saw the countenance of a man appear behind the bars. She ran to the window, and opened it.

"Felton!" she exclaimed, "I am saved."

"Yes," said Felton, "but silence! I must have time to file the bars; only be careful that we are not perceived through the wicket."

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Her ladyship closed the window and put out her lamp, as Felton had advised. Amidst the raging of the storm she heard the grating of the file against the bars, and, by the light of every flash, she beheld the form of Felton behind the glass. She passed an hour in breathless suspense; icy drops stood on her brow. At the expiration of that time, Felton again tapped, and she opened the window to find that two bars had been removed.

"Are you ready?" demanded Felton.

Her ladyship mounted a chair and passed the upper part of her body through the window. She saw the young officer suspended over the abyss by a ladder of ropes, and, for the first time, a feeling of fear reminded her that she was a woman.

Felton fastened her. two wrists with his handkerchief, and then bound a cord above the handkerchief. "Now," he said, "put your arms around my neck, and do not be alarmed: I am a sailor."

She did as he directed, and allowed herself to be drawn through the window, whereupon Felton began to descend the ladder slowly, step by step. Suddenly Felton heard the footsteps of the patrol, who were passing on their round. They were about to pass directly under the ladder.

They both remained suspended, motionless, and scarcely even venturing to breathe, while the soldiers passed beneath them, laughing and talking. The patrol passed by and they heard the sound of their retreating footsteps, and the murmur of their voices dying away in the distance. "Now," said Felton, "we are saved!"

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He continued to descend till his feet touched the ground, and then, raising her ladyship in his arms, retreated rapidly in the direction opposite to that which the patrol had taken. He plunged down among the rocks, and, when he had reached the seashore, a boat appeared, manned by four men.

"To the sloop!" said Felton, "and pull quickly."

"What vessel is this, and whither will it take me?" she demanded.

"Wheresoever you please, after you have landed me at Portsmouth, for there I must go to execute the orders of Lord de Winter. As he distrusted me, he determined to guard you himself, so has sent me in his stead to procure Buckingham's signature to the order for your transportation."

"Ah, then you are going to Portsmouth?"

"Yes, and I have no time to lose; to-morrow is the twenty-third, and Buckingham departs on that date with his fleet for La Rochelle."

"He must not go!" exclaimed her ladyship, forgetting her habitual presence of mind.

"Make your mind easy," answered Felton, "he will *not* go."

The sloop quickly carried them to a little bay just beside Portsmouth, where Felton went ashore. It was agreed that her ladyship should wait for him till ten o'clock, and that if he had not returned by that hour, she should sail for France.

Portsmouth lay in the morning mists, and there Felton hastened as fast as he could. He turned over in his mind, as he walked, all the accusations which his

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severe Puritan mind had ever heard against the king's favourite. The idea that he left behind him, exposed to a dreadful vengeance, a woman whom he now looked upon as a saint, elevated his soul above the feelings of humanity.

On entering Portsmouth, he found the whole population astir. The drums were beating in the streets and in the harbour, and the troops about to be embarked were descending towards the sea. Felton arrived at the Admiralty House, covered with dust and wet with perspiration. The sentinel wished to stop him, but Felton called for the officer-on-guard and drew from his pocket the letter which he carried.

"An express from Lord de Winter," said he. At the name of Lord de Winter, who was known to be one of Buckingham's most intimate friends, the officer admitted Felton, who, moreover, wore the uniform of a naval officer himself. The valet conducted him to a large room, and announced, "Lieutenant Felton, from Lord de Winter."

"Leave us, Patrick," said Buckingham to his valet. "Now we are alone, sir, speak!"

"My Lord," said Felton, "the Baron de Winter lately wrote to your grace requesting you to sign an order for the transportation of a young woman, named Charlotte Backson." He drew the paper from his pocket and handed it to the duke.

The duke put his pen to the paper. Felton became pale.

"I cannot believe," continued Felton, "that your grace is aware that this refers to Lady de Winter."

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"I am perfectly aware of it, although I am astonished that you should know."

"You shall not sign this order, my lord," said Felton. "You will consult your own conscience and render justice to the lady."

"It would be bare justice if she were sent to be hanged," said the duke. "Her ladyship is an infamous creature. Are you mad, to speak thus to me?"

"My lord," continued Felton, becoming more excited as he spoke, "you have injured this young girl cruelly; now let her depart freely. The whole of England is wearied by your iniquities, and you have abused the royal power which you have usurped. God will punish you in eternity, and I will punish you now."

"Help!" shouted the duke, leaping towards his sword. But Felton did not give him time to draw it; he clutched an open knife under his doublet, and in one bound was upon the duke. At that moment, Patrick entered the room, exclaiming:

"My lord, a letter from France."

"From France!" cried Buckingham, forgetting every thing else for the time being. Felton took advantage of the moment, and buried the knife up to the handle in the duke's side. Then he rushed into the adjoining room and hurried towards the staircase, and there, on the first step, met Lord de Winter, who—on seeing him with blood on his hands and face—exclaimed:

"I knew it—I foresaw it! One minute too late! Alas, how unfortunate is my lot."

Felton did not attempt to resist and was led away by the guards, while his lordship hastened to Buckingham's room. Cries of despair resounded on every side

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and the house was filled with lamentations and groans. But the duke was not yet dead, for he recovered his senses, opened his eyes, and asked to be left alone with Patrick and the messenger from France. The seal was broken and the letter held vainly before his eyes, for he could not decipher the writing.

"Read it quickly," said he, "I shall soon be no longer able to hear, and shall die without knowing what she has written."

So La Porte, the messenger, read aloud to him:

"*My Lord,*

I implore you, if you have any regard for my repose, to put an end to those vast preparations which you are making against France. That war may not only bring great calamities on France and England, but even upon yourself. Be careful of your own life, which is threatened.

Yours affectionately,

ANN."

"Ah," said Buckingham, "God be praised. My death will not be to her as the death of a stranger." Then in a last convulsion, against which he could no longer contend, he fell from the couch to the floor.

As soon as Lord de Winter knew that Buckingham was dead, he ran to Felton, whom the soldiers still guarded on the terrace. "Wretch!" said he, "you have been made the instrument of that cursed woman; but I swear to you it shall be her last crime."

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CHAPTER XXIV.

In France.

On hearing of the death of Buckingham, the king of England, Charles I, feared that intelligence so terrible might discourage the Rochellois. Hence he endeavoured, as Richelieu afterwards wrote in his memoirs, to conceal it from them as long as possible by prohibiting all departure of ships from the ports of his kingdom. But one boat had already left the port, bearing her ladyship, who suspected what had happened and was confirmed in her belief by seeing a black flag appear from the mast of the admiral's ship.

Meanwhile D'Artagnan and his friends continued before La Rochelle, ignorant of the course that events were taking. But one item of information had come into the hands of the young Gascon, for he heard that the queen had been able to rescue her faithful seamstress from the agents of the cardinal, and to have her sent in safety to the Convent at Bethune. That explained the mysterious note, and the momentary glimpse which they had had of Madame Bonancieux on the Chalons Road. But all four feared that Milady might discover that the young woman had taken shelter there, and wreak vengeance upon her. Accordingly Aramis wrote once more to his mysterious little friend at Tours, and they soon received back from her the following letter:

"The Superior of the Convent of Bethune will deliver into the hands of the bearer of this note the novice who entered the Convent under my recommendation. *ANN."*

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So, as soon as possible, the four of them took leave for six days and set out for Bethune. On the evening of the twenty-sixth, as they dismounted to dine at the Tavern of the *Golden Harrow*, a cavalier came out of the yard where he had just changed his horse, and proceeded at full gallop along the Paris Road. D'Artagnan had one brief look at the man, and turned pale.

"It is he," he exclaimed, "that accursed man I first met at Meung. He is, I am sure, another agent of the cardinal and the accomplice of my lady." Then he picked up a scrap of paper which the horseman had just let fall from his hat. It contained but one word.

"Armentieres," read Porthos, "that is the name of a town."

"And this name of a town is written in the hand of my lady," said Athos grimly. "To horse, my friends!" The four comrades set off at a gallop on the road to Bethune.

There was indeed need for apprehension, for already my lady had passed between the cruisers of two nations, and landed at Boulogne without mishap. There she represented herself as a French lady, whom the English had driven out of their country on account of hostility towards France. She quickly wrote and despatched the following letter:

"*My Lord,*

Your eminence may be assured that his grace, the Duke of Buckingham, will not set out for France. According to your eminence's desire, I am proceeding to the Carmelite Convent at Bethune, where I shall await your orders."

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She then started on her journey, and, at five o'clock on the evening of the next day, arrived at Bethune. She enquired her way to the Convent of the Carmelites and immediately entered it, and the sight of the cardinal's order secured for her ready hospitality. The past had now all faded from her sight and her eyes were fixed on the future.

After breakfast, the abbess came to pay her a visit. There are few amusements in a convent, and the good superior was in haste to strike up acquaintance with her new boarder. She was a quiet woman, and my lady kept fairly reserved in her company, as she did not know whether the abbess was a supporter of the king or of the cardinal. She tried to find out, by making a few remarks about the severity of the cardinal.

"I am very ignorant of such matters," said the abbess, "but even here we have proofs of the truth of what you say, for one of our boarders has suffered severely from the vengeance and persecutions of the cardinal."

"What is her name?" asked my lady.

"She has been recommended to me by a person of the highest rank, so I have not tried to find out her real name."

"When may I see this lady, for whom I already feel so great a sympathy?" demanded her ladyship.

"This evening," replied the abbess. "But as you have been travelling for five days, you had better now lie down and rest till dinner time."

So her ladyship complied with this excellent advice, and slept, to dream of vengeance against D'Artagnan and Athos. On opening her eyes, she saw the ab-

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bess, accompanied by a young woman who was entirely unknown to her. The abbess presented them to each other, and then left them to enjoy each other's company and conversation.

"O," said the newcomer, "I have been in this house for six months now, without the shadow of amusement. Your presence would provide me with charming company, but now I am soon to leave the convent."

"What," said my lady, "are you going away so soon? I hear from the good abbess that you, like myself, have suffered from the persecutions of the cardinal?"

"Yes," said the novice, "and because of my devotion to a woman whom I loved, whom I still love so that I would give my life for her."

My lady determined to find out more, and wondered whether the queen was the person for whom the stranger expressed this love.

"Even the queen fears the cardinal," said she. "At least, so I have heard; I do not know the queen personally, though I know several of her friends—M. de Putange, M. de Treville—"

"Ah," said the young woman, eagerly, "you know M. de Treville? Then you must also know his famous musketeers, Messrs. Athos, Porthos, and Aramis, and their friend D'Artagnan?"

"Yes, I know them too," said her ladyship, with a cold shudder running through her heart. Then she suddenly realised the position. "Then you are Madame Bonancieux!" she exclaimed. "Why, M. D'Artagnan

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has told me all about you, how you were abducted and how he and his friends searched for you in vain. So it is here that you have taken refuge ?"

"But now," said Madame Bonancieux, "my punishment draws to an end. To-morrow, perhaps even this evening, he will be here to rescue me, he and those gallant musketeers. Read this !" And she handed my lady a small note, in which she read :

"My dear child, be ready. You will soon be snatched from the prison where it was necessary, for your own safety, to conceal you. Our brave Gascon has shown himself as faithful as ever ; tell him there is much gratitude in a certain quarter for the warning he gave."

"Yes," said her ladyship, "the letter is very precise. And do you know what the warning was ?"

"No, I only suspect that he must have warned the queen of some new machinations of the cardinal."

"Yes," said her ladyship, "that is it, beyond a doubt." Her mind worked furiously ; so it was D'Artagnan that she had to thank for all her troubles in England. At that moment, the gallop of a horse was heard.

"Oh," said Madame Bonancieux, rushing to the window, "can this be he ? No, it is a man whom I do not know, and he has stopped here."

Presently the abbess ushered in a gentleman who had asked to see her ladyship, and then Madame Bonancieux and the abbess retired. Her ladyship uttered a cry of joy ; it was the Count de Rochefort, the familiar friend and adviser of his eminence.

"So you have arrived from England ?" he said anxiously. "What about Buckingham ?"

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"He is dead or dangerously wounded. As I was leaving, without having obtained anything from him, a fanatic had just assassinated him."

"Ah," said Rochefort, smiling, "that is a very favourable chance, and will please his eminence much."

"But there is more," said her ladyship. "Do you know whom I have met here? The same Madame Bonancieux, whose refuge the cardinal could not discover, and the four musketeers are coming here to-morrow to carry her away to safety. Now I have made her my best friend, and when you send the cardinal's order for me to leave here, I shall have no difficulty in persuading her to come with me."

Thus the precious plan was hatched, and they parted, after promising to meet at Armentieres. Lest he should forget the name, my lady wrote it on a piece of paper, the same that was ultimately to pass by an accident into the possession of D'Artagnan when he rode through Arras an hour later.

Later in the day, Madame Bonancieux once more returned. "Well," she said, "I hear that the cardinal is to send for you this evening or to-morrow."

Her ladyship signed to her to speak silently. "That was not the agent of the cardinal," she whispered; "it is my brother, and he has come to rescue me from the power of the cardinal. He intercepted the cardinal's messenger, attacked him, and took his papers from him. In an hour or so he will bring a carriage and take me away in the name of the cardinal."

"I understand! it is your brother who will bring this carriage," said the confiding Madame Bonancieux.

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"Yes," said my lady, "and something more! My brother knows that this letter you have received is false, and only a snare to carry you off. He knows that M. D'Artagnan and his friends are at La Rochelle, and that agents of the cardinal, in the dress of musketeers, are even now on the way to capture you."

"Oh, my God! my head fails in the midst of such a chaos of iniquities. I shall go mad unless I can find some one to help me," said Madame Bonancieux, putting her hand to her forehead.

"There is one thing to do," said her ladyship. "You must conceal yourself in the neighbourhood, as I am about to do, until my brother arrives to rescue me. I shall take you with me; we can hide and wait together."

At that moment, the sound of galloping horses was heard on the road, and her ladyship gazed anxiously through the gathering dusk. She saw a glitter of laced hats and realised that the musketeers had arrived; in advance of his companions rode D'Artagnan.

"O, my God!" said Madame Bonancieux, "who is it?"

"It is the uniform of the cardinal's guards; there is not a moment to be lost," exclaimed her ladyship. "Let us fly!"

Madame Bonancieux attempted to walk, but her knees collapsed and she fell to the ground. "My strength is all gone," she moaned, "save yourself, and leave me."

A savage look flashed from her ladyship's eyes; she ran to the table and poured into Madame Bonan-

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cieux's glass a powder from the hollow part of a ring, which she opened with great dexterity.

"Drink," she said hastily; "this wine will give you strength—drink!" She put the glass to the lips of the young woman, who drank mechanically. "It was not thus that I wished to avenge myself," she muttered, "but we must do the best we can." Then she rushed from the room.

Madame Bonancieux saw her go as in a dream; then she heard a loud murmur of approaching voices, and she thought she heard her own name mentioned by the voice of D'Artagnan.

"D'Artagnan!" she exclaimed, "is it you?"

The door of her room was burst open and many men rushed in, to find her fallen down without the power of motion. D'Artagnan threw away a pistol he held and knelt down beside her in anxiety, while Porthos and Aramis sheathed their drawn swords.

"Ah, she told me you would never come—she thought you were the cardinal's guards and has just fled," she murmured.

"*She?*" said D'Artagnan, becoming paler; "of whom are you talking? What is her name?"

While Porthos was calling for help, Aramis ran for a glass of water, but he stopped on beholding the countenance of Athos, who was standing, his features frozen with terror, looking into one of the wine glasses. "Oh," said Athos, "it is impossible! Such a crime would never be allowed by the Almighty!"

"Ah, I remember now," whispered Madame Bonancieux, "her name was Lady de Winter." At the

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same moment a deadly spasm seized her; one long sigh came from her lips, and that last sigh was the passage of her soul to eternity.

D'Artagnan uttered a cry and turned as pale and motionless as the poor dead lady; Porthos wept and Aramis raised his hand to Heaven, while Athos crossed himself. At that moment a man appeared, almost as pale as those who were in the chamber.

"If I am not mistaken," he said, "you are M. D' Artagnan and those are your three friends, Athos, Aramis, and Porthos. You, like myself, are seeking a woman who must have been present here—for I see a dead body. You remember me; I am Lord de Winter, the brother-in-law of the woman."

"Welcome, my lord," said Athos, "you are one of us." Then, to the horror-stricken abbess, he said, "Madame, we leave to your pious care the body of this unfortunate woman. Treat her as if she had been one of your own sisters; we shall return one day to pray for her soul."

Then all five, followed by their servants and horses, went towards the town of Bethune and stopped at the first hotel they found.

"But are we not going to follow that woman?" asked D'Artagnan.

"Bye and bye," said Athos, "but I have some preparations to make. I will answer for it that she does not escape."

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CHAPTER XXV.

The Man in the Red Cloak.

Athos was the last to retire to his chamber, where he made the landlord bring him a map of the province, which he examined for long with amazing diligence till he had ascertained all the roads leading from Bethune to Armentieres. Then he called the valets and gave precise instructions to Grimaud, Planchet, Mousqueton, and Bazin. All were to go to Armentieres by different roads, and, if they discovered her ladyship, three of them were to keep watch and the fourth to bring back the information.

Athos then girded on his sword and left the hotel; it was ten o'clock at night and the streets were empty. After asking a watchman for some directions, he managed to find a small melancholy looking house which stood all alone. He knocked, and the door was opened by a man of tall stature and pale complexion, with a black beard and hair. Athos explained the cause of his visit and what he required of him, but the stranger drew back in affright and refused. Athos then drew from his pocket a paper, on which were written two lines followed by a signature and a seal, and, when the man recognised this seal, he bowed his head in agreement, saying that he was prepared to obey. Athos demanded nothing more, but left the house, returned to the hotel, and retired to his own chamber.

On the following morning, Planchet returned, and all was as Athos had foreseen. The astute fellow had followed the path of Milady, and had discovered where she ultimately engaged a carriage to continue her flight.

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At last he had traced the carriage to Armentieres, where there was only a single hotel, and found that she had indeed engaged a room there. So at eight o'clock in the evening, all the horses were saddled, and the four friends, along with Lord de Winter, made ready to set out. Athos came last and found D'Artagnan already mounted and impatient.

"Patience," said Athos, "there is still one more."

Presently a man joined them, who wore a mask and was wrapped in a red cloak. Lord de Winter and the other three questioned each other by their glances, but all were ignorant of the man, so they concluded that it must be all right since Athos had so arranged.

It was a dark and stormy night; large clouds careered across the heavens, veiling the brightness of the stars. On several occasions, Lord de Winter or Porthos would address a remark to the man with the red cloak, but, at each interrogation, he bowed his head without reply. Presently a man advanced to the middle of the road and stopped them. It was Grimaud, and he brought the news that Milady had quitted Armentieres and was alone in a house where the others were still keeping watch.

The troop proceeded on its way. A flash of lightning blazed forth, and a small solitary house was visible, on the bank of a river beside a ferry. A man who had been lying in a ditch arose. It was Mosqueton, and he pointed with his finger at the lighted window of the house. "She is there!" he whispered.

Athos dismounted and advanced towards the window, after having made a sign to the remainder of the troop to proceed towards the door. He went up to the window, and, by the light of a lamp, he could perceive

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a woman covered by a dark-coloured cloak, seated on a stool before an expiring fire. Her face was not visible, but an ominous smile arose upon the lips of Athos. He was not mistaken; he had, in truth, found the woman he had sought.

He pushed the window with his hands, so that it gave way, and Athos, like a spectre of vengeance, leapt into the room. Her ladyship ran to the door and opened it; paler and more threatening than Athos himself, D'Artagnan was standing there. She started back and screamed. All the men entered the room, the man in the red cloak coming last. On seeing her brother-in-law, she uttered a fearful cry.

"What do you want?" she demanded.

"We want," said Athos, "Ann de Breuil, called first the Countess de la Fere, and then Lady de Winter, to judge her according to her crimes. You will be free to defend yourself and justify your conduct if you can. D'Artagnan, you must be the first accuser."

D'Artagnan came forward. "Before God and man," he said, "I accuse this woman of having poisoned Constance Bonancieux who died last night. She previously tried to poison me by some wine sent from Villeroi, but a man named Brisemont died instead of me."

"It is now for you to speak, Lord de Winter," said Athos.

The baron came forward in his turn. "Before God and before man," said he, "I accuse this woman of having caused the Duke of Buckingham to be assassinated." All started with horror at this unexpected news. "From the warning letter which you sent me," continued the baron, "I had her arrested and placed

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under the custody of a faithful follower. She corrupted this man and placed the dagger in his hand; she made him kill the duke, and, at this moment, Felton has paid with his head for the crimes of this fiend."

"It is now my turn," said Athos. "I married this woman when she was a young girl. I gave her all my property; I gave her my name; and one day I discovered that she was branded—she bore the mark of a *fleur-de-lys* on her left shoulder."

"Oh!" said her ladyship, rising, "I defy you to find the tribunal which pronounced on me the infamous sentence—I defy you to find the man who executed it."

"Silence!" exclaimed a voice. "It is for me to answer that." And the man in the red cloak came forward.

"Who is that man? Who is he?" cried her ladyship, suffocated with terror, so that her hair raised itself upon her head as if it had been endowed with life. After slowly and solemnly approaching her ladyship, till the table alone separated them, the stranger took off his mask. She looked for some time with increasing terror on the pale countenance; then suddenly arose and retreated towards the wall. "The executioner of Lille!" she cried in affright, clinging to the wall with her hands for support.

"Yes," said the stranger, turning to the others, "the executioner of Lille! Formerly my brother was a young priest, and he was tempted and led away by this woman; she even persuaded him to steal the sacred vessels, for which he was caught and branded. But I followed and discovered her; I bound her and imprinted on her body the same brand as that which I had been compelled to place on my brother."

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"Gentlemen," said Athos, "what punishment do you demand for this woman?"

"The punishment of death," answered every man there.

Athos stretched out his hand towards her. "Ann de Breuil," cried he, "Countess de la Fere, Lady de Winter, your crimes have wearied men on earth and God in heaven. If you know of any prayer, repeat it, for you are condemned and are about to die."

They led her out of the cottage. It was almost midnight, and the full moon, red as blood, was rising after the storm behind the little village of Armentieres. In front, the river Lys rolled its waters like a stream of molten fire, and an owl kept uttering its sharp monotonous screech.

They led her ladyship down to the river bank, where the dread executioner prepared his great sword, and bound her arms to meet her approaching doom. Then he lifted her into a boat, in order that the sentence might be carried out across the river. Athos took one step towards her.

"I pardon you," he said, "the evil you have done me. I forgive you for my future crushed, my honour lost, my love tainted, and my salvation for ever imperilled by the despair into which you have thrown me. Go in peace!"

The boat proceeded towards the left bank of the Lys, carrying away the criminal and the executioner. All the others on the right bank remained on their knees in prayer, while the sentence of justice was carried out.

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CHAPTER XXVI.

A Message from the Cardinal.

Three days afterwards, the four musketeers re-entered Paris. A few days later, the king returned to Rochelle, stunned by the news which were beginning to circulate in the city, that Buckingham had been assassinated. When his death was announced to the queen, she said :

"It is false ! He has just written to me."

Nevertheless the king returned to La Rochelle, and all the four comrades had to accompany him. But their companions often wondered why the four musketeers were so silent, travelling with heavy eyes and heads depressed.

One day they had stopped in a tavern by the road side, and a man, coming post-haste from La Rochelle, stopped at the door to drink a glass of wine and saw the four musketeers seated at a table.

"Hulloa, M. D'Artagnan," said he, "Is it you that I see there ?"

D'Artagnan raised his head and uttered an exclamation of joy. It was the stranger of Meung, that mysterious man who had so often crossed his path, but whom he had never been able to meet. D'Artagnan drew his sword and rushed towards the door, saying :

"I meet you at last ; this time you shall not escape me."

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"It is not my intention, sir; for I am looking for you this time. In the king's name, I arrest you! I am the Count de Rochefort, and I am commanded to conduct you before his eminence."

"We are now returning to his eminence, sir,!" said Athos, coming forward, "and you must take M. D'Artagnan's word that he will go direct to La Rochelle."

De Rochefort threw a glance behind him, and saw that Porthos and Aramis had placed themselves between him and the door, and he understood that he was entirely at the mercy of the four.

"Gentlemen," said he, "if M. D'Artagnan will deliver up his sword and return in your guardianship to La Rochelle, I will be content with your promise to conduct him to his eminence, the cardinal. That suits me better, for I shall be able to continue my journey."

They decided to do so, and they all proceeded on their journey. The next day they reached Surgeres, and there the cardinal had come to meet the king, where he freely congratulated his majesty on the happy chance which had freed France from her inveterate enemy. Then, hearing that D'Artagnan had been placed under arrest, he took leave of the king.

He found the three musketeers all armed, and D'Artagnan without his sword, standing before the door of the house where he resided for the time being. On this occasion, as he had all his retinue about him, he looked sternly at them and signed for D'Artagnan to follow him. The Gascon obeyed.

"We will wait for you, D'Artagnan," said Athos, loud enough for the cardinal to hear.

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His eminence knitted his brow, stopped for an instant, and then went on without uttering a single word. They proceeded to a private room, where D'Artagnan found himself alone with the cardinal for a second interview, and this time fully convinced that it would be his last.

"Sir," said the cardinal, "you have been arrested by my orders. Do you know why? You are accused of corresponding with the enemies of the realm, of having pried into secrets of State, and of having attempted to make your general's plans miscarry."

"And who is my accuser, my lord?" inquired D'Artagnan; "a woman branded by the justice of her country—a woman who was married to one man in France and another in England—a woman who poisoned her second husband and attempted to poison me?"

"Sir," said the cardinal, "if Lady de Winter has been guilty of the crimes you have mentioned, she shall be punished."

"She has already been punished by us, sir. She is dead. My friends and I tried and condemned her."

D'Artagnan then related the poisoning of Madame Bonancieux in the Convent, the trial in the solitary house, and the execution on the banks of the Lys. A shudder ran through the frame of the cardinal, which was not easily made to shudder, but soon his dark countenance became clear again.

"So," he said, in a voice, the gentleness of which contrasted strangely with his words, "you constituted yourselves judges, without considering that those who are not legally appointed, and who punish without au-

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thority, are assassins ? I may tell you that you will be tried, and even condemned."

"Another might reply to your eminence that he had his pardon in his pocket; I content myself with saying that I am ready." And D'Artagnan presented to the cardinal the precious paper which Athos had extorted from her ladyship, and which he had given to D'Artagnan to serve him as a safeguard. The cardinal took the paper and read in a very slow voice, lingering over each syllable:

"It is by my order, and for the good of the State, that the bearer of this has done what he has done.

RICHELIEU."

The cardinal, after having read these two lines, fell into a profound reverie and did not return the paper to D'Artagnan. At length he raised his head and fixed his eagle eye on the loyal, open, and intelligent countenance of the young man, and thought of what the future might hold for such a one. He slowly tore up the paper which D'Artagnan had so generously returned to him.

"I am lost," said D'Artagnan in his heart.

The cardinal wrote some words on a parchment, of which two-thirds were already filled up, and affixed his seal.

"Here!" said the cardinal; "I took one blank commission from you, and I give you another. The name is not inserted in the commission; you will add it yourself."

D'Artagnan took the paper with hesitation, and found that it was the commission of a lieutenant in the musketeers. "My lord," he said, "my life is yours—

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make use of it henceforth. But I have three friends who are more worthy of this than I."

"You are a brave youth, D'Artagnan," said the cardinal, tapping him familiarly on the shoulder. "Do what you like with the commission; it is blank. Only remember that it is to you I give it."

D'Artagnan bowed deeply to his eminence, and left the room. Outside he found his three friends awaiting him, and they were just beginning to be impatient. He told all that had happened and displayed the coveted commission, but promised to give them a fuller description in the evening.

That evening, D'Artagnan went to see Athos, where he told him all that had happened and drew the commission from his pocket. "Hear, dear Athos," he said, "this naturally belongs to you."

But Athos smiled his soft and gentle smile. "For Athos," he said, "it is too much—for the Count de la Fere, too little. Keep this, D'Artagnan, it belongs to you." So D'Artagnan left Athos and went to Porthos. He found his giant friend clothed in a most magnificent coat covered with silver embroidery, admiring himself in a mirror, and offered him the commission in the musketeers.

But Porthos said, with a smile, "My dear D'Artagnan, I am now giving up this hard life as a soldier, for in a very few days, I am to be married. You see, I am fitting on my wedding garments. So keep the lieutenancy, my dear fellow; by right it is yours."

The young man repaired to Aramis, whom he found kneeling before an oratory, with an open book of pray-

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ers. So he offered him the commission, saying, "You have merited it more than anyone by your wisdom and your counsels, always followed by such fortune."

"Alas, dear friend," said Aramis "our last adventures have disgusted me with the military life, and my decision is made. Now I enter the Church as a priest. Keep the commission, D'Artagnan."

Then he returned to Athos and told him all that had happened, and his friend took the commission and wrote in the blank space the name of D'Artagnan. But the young man let his head fall on his hands and wept bitter tears. "I shall no longer have friends," he said, "nothing but bitter recollections."

"You are young," said Athos, "and time will change them into tender remembrances."

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NOTES.

Gascon, the people of Gascony are the northerners of France, noted for their bold and adventurous disposition.

M. de Treville, the M. is a contraction for the French word "monsieur," and the equivalent of the English "Mr."

Louvre, the Paris palace of the old French kings.

Rue Ferou, Ferou Street.

Bastille, the dreaded French prison, into which men were often cast secretly without a trial, and never seen again.

Fleur-de-lys, the national coat-of-arms of France. In the old days, a barbarous punishment inflicted on thieves was to have the fleur-de-lys burnt on to the skin with a red-hot iron. It means "Flower of the lily."

Hugenots, the French protestants, who were subjected to much persecution by the catholic rulers of France in the seventeenth century.

Bastion, a fortified position.

Pioneers, soldiers of the sapper or miner type, whose duty it is to work with spade and shovel, rather than with weapons.

Mass, the service of the Catholic church.

Child of Belial, practically "son of Satan." This was a phrase which the bigoted Puritans were fond of applying to Catholics and Anglicans.

Oratory, a small wooden enclosure, within a cathedral or a Catholic chapel.

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